UNIVERSIDAD COMPLUTENSE DE MADRID

FACULTAD DE FILOLOGÍA

Departamento de Filología Inglesa II
(Literatura de los Paises de Lengua Inglesa),

MITOGRAFÍA Y MITOPOEIA DEL JAZZ Y DEL BLUES EN LA CULTURA ESTADOUNIDENSE CONTEMPORÁNEA

MEMORIA PARA OPTAR AL GRADO DE DOCTOR
PRESENTADA POR

Claudia Alonso Recarte

Bajo la dirección de los doctores
Isabel Durán Giménez-Rico
Eduardo Valls Oyarzun,

Madrid, 2012

UNIVERSIDAD COMPLUTENSE DE MADRID

DEPARTAMENTO DE FILOLOGÍA INGLESA II

FACULTAD DE FILOLOGÍA

MITOGRAFÍA Y MITOPOEIA DEL JAZZ Y DEL BLUES EN LA CULTURA ESTADOUNIDENSE CONTEMPORÁNEA

JAZZ AND BLUES-IDIOMATIC MYTHOGRAPHY AND MYTHOPOEIA IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN CULTURE

TESIS DOCTORAL EUROPEA

Presentada por:

Claudia Alonso Recarte

Dirigida por:

Dra. Isabel Durán Giménez-Rico

Dr. Eduardo Valls Oyarzun

Madrid, 2012

DEPARTAMENTO DE FILOLOGÍA INGLESA II

UNIVERSIDAD COMPLUTENSE DE MADRID

MITOGRAFÍA Y MITOPOEIA DEL JAZZ Y DEL BLUES EN LA CULTURA ESTADOUNIDENSE CONTEMPORÁNEA

JAZZ AND BLUES-IDIOMATIC MYTHOGRAPHY AND MYTHOPOEIA IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN CULTURE

Tesis Doctoral presentada por

CLAUDIA ALONSO RECARTE

Para la obtención del Grado de Doctor, Mención Europea

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible without the financial aid from several institutions. I would like to thank the Fundación Caja Madrid for granting me a one-year postgraduate scholarship to initiate my studies in jazz and jazz literature at Rutgers University and the Jazz Institute in Newark, New Jersey. I would also like to thank the Franklin Institute at the University of Alcalá for granting me the Washington Irving scholarship, and the Friends of Thoreau research program, also at the Franklin Institute, for providing me with another year-long fellowship which allowed me to continue with my research as I ventured as well into new academic fields. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the Complutense University for granting me additional aid through their scholarship for Ph.D. researchers.

Special thanks goes to my supervisors, Professor Isabel Durán Giménez-Rico and Dr. Eduardo Valls Oyarzun, who dedicated their time and expertise to the reading, editing and perfecting of this study and whose insight has been invaluable not only for the polishing of the contents and structure, but for guiding me throughout the years to become a disciplined scholar. I am as well indebted to Dr. Ana Antón-Pacheco Bravo for supervising my M.A. thesis and for initiating me in the development of what in time became my doctoral dissertation.

Special thanks as well to Professor Klaus Benesch and Professor Boris Vejdovsky for their critical input in the evaluation of the final drafts and for their academic support and encouragement throughout the period of research. I also wish to express my gratitude to Professor Félix Martín Gutiérrez and to Dr. Carmen Méndez García, from the Complutense University, for the constant help and advice they have given me with throughout the years.

My research abroad would not have been as enriching had it not been for the support from many people. Lewis Porter kindly allowed me to audit and actively participate in his Jazz Historiography and Ethnomusicology courses at Rutgers University, and deserves full credit for introducing me to the notion of mythistory and recommending helpful bibliography. I also thank John Howland for inviting me to participate in his Jazz Literature course, and Dan Morgenstern for his kind invitation to use the resources available at the Jazz Institute. I am just as much indebted to my classmates at Rutgers for sharing with me their experiences within the jazz culture: Tim

Wilkins, Jared Pauley, Juan Cachinero, Victor Svorinich, Hyland Harris and Brad Faberman.

My months at the Amerika Institut at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München were critical for the discussions as to what direction the dissertation would take, and I thank the entire staff and the researchers for their guiding hand and their generosity in every aspect during my stay. I am extremely grateful to Sascha Pöhlmann, Anna Flügge, Fabian Diesner, Thea Diesner, Berndt Ostendorf, Christof Decker, Andrew Estes, Britta Walshdmitt-Nelson, Kerstin Schmidt, Sonja Teine, Torsten Kathke, Charlotte Lerg, Angelika Möller, Anita Vrzina, Peter Just, Sebastian Lie Huber and Thoren Opitz.

A special thank you is extended to Ana, Natalie, David, Susana, Alicia, Rocío, Carlos, María and Natalia from the Complutense University, and Jesús Moya and Begoña Ruiz from the University of Castilla-La Mancha. It is a joy to be around you and an honor to have you as my colleagues.

Thank you to my grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins, and to Emilio and Herminia for their constant support.

To my dear friends Teresa, Patricia, Merche, César, Óscar, Ángel, and Manu, for being the beautiful, caring people they are and for being the strong pillars that I can't do without.

To my loving parents and my sister for always supporting me in every aspect of my life and work. Not only have they been role models of hard work, commitment and persistence, but they have taught me what I have learned is the most priceless lesson of all: to feel spiritually and morally involved in one's own research.

Finally, my deepest gratitude goes to my companion, my touchstone, my soul mate, my team: Nacho. Words will always fall short of expressing how blessed I feel to have you as my inspiration.

For my parents, Ana and Enrique

and

for Nacho

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

And my slumbering fantasy assumes reality
Until it seems it's not a dream
The two are you and me
Shades of delight, cocoa hue
Rich as the night Afro-blue

"Afro-Blue"

Jazz is music, but it has never, in its short history, been an object of commentary limited to musicians. In 1925, H.S. Gordon published an article titled "The Jazz Myth," in which he began by claiming that "the outstanding achievement of jazz is that everybody has, or had, an opinion about it" (2002: 430). He later adds that "the notable thing is not jazz, but the jazz-craze. It is precisely because everybody talked about it that it is remarkable, and for no other reason whatsoever" (2002: 430). Gordon spoke of jazz itself as being a myth, in the sense that it was built on the erroneous assumptions that the music represented some form of aesthetic novelty, for he felt that "its monotony was deadly" (2002: 430). Myth in this context is to be understood as rhetoric empowered with the ability to distort into an illusion, a falsity. Regardless of what his understanding of myth was, Gordon was on to something when he noticed that during the 1920s, everybody seemed to have an opinion about the music – nobody was impervious to it. Jazz has had the power to define two time periods of twentieth-century America: the Jazz Age and the Swing Era, which is the closest that the aesthetic ever got to becoming America's most popular music. Despite the decrease of popularity ever

since (today jazz records account for about 3 percent of total album sales in the United States), jazz remains a highly vivid aesthetic at a cultural level. Its acceptance within the academia has augmented its mystified aura as a music made for and by intellectuals with an acute sensibility. The image of the jazzman as generally portrayed in film and photography is lacquered by a mysteriousness characteristic of a tormented genius and the music itself tends to represent a style rebelling against mainstream taste, a resistance to commercialism. Jazz, in other words, rests upon a mythical platform that often overpowers actual musical merits, regardless of the fact that very few people (in contrast to pop, rock, classic or country music fans, for example) actually consider it to be their music of preference.

As a scholar who has always enjoyed musically-oriented literature, I was drawn to jazz during the last years of my undergraduate education. I had studied classical flute as a child but quit after a few years, and during these last years of college I decided to pick it up again and try out what jazz was all about. I also took up the guitar and attended a few music theory classes to refresh my memory and acquire further insight. Needless to say, the discipline that was demanded of such crafts went way over my head, not only because try I as would, there was no way that I could make up for all the years that jazz students had dedicated to their own training, but also because I had only recently begun to listen seriously to jazz and the blues. In a way, the more I came to learn about jazz, the more I felt the gap between myself and the music to widen. Perhaps to make up for my lack of knowledge (and talent), I enthusiastically turned to devouring all forms of jazz fiction. Beat writers that had for years been at the top of my list found themselves dethroned by Amiri Baraka, Langston Hughes, James Baldwin, Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker, Albert Murray, and especially by Ralph Ellison. I was allured by the poetic drive and political commentary that all these writers were able to convey through the jazz and blues idiom metaphor – I was attracted to its potential as a creator of myths.

After a year of research at Rutgers University and auditing four classes of the Master's Program in Jazz History and Research, I wrote my MA thesis on Ellison's mystification of jazz in *Invisible Man*. Although today many of the passages that I put in black and white make me cringe on account of their youthful naivety, I consider it to have been my first scholarly step in which I consciously attempted to be honest with the material that I was working with: honest about my growing, yet still very limited,

knowledge about jazz, honest about the extent to which I could defend an argument without relying on glibness to procure me with a solution to my ignorance, and honest about how my race and gender could potentially alienate me even more from jazz and jazz writing.

Four years later, after extensive reading and exhaustive sessions of listening to records, I still hardly consider myself an expert on jazz. My jazz record collection has increased to about three hundred and fifty albums – hardly the numbers of a modest record collector. My admiration for the musicians is not one built on mystification, but on respect towards their highly demanding discipline. I do, however, consider to have cultivated my literary knowledge enough to appropriately approach some of the issues regarding jazz narrative and myth, and I have consciously attempted not to venture beyond the literary and cultural perspectives in my own writing.

The elaboration of this dissertation has, therefore, been a deeply personal journey. Aside from the problems related to musicianship, I have systematically addressed my own assumptions about race almost on a daily basis. Like many middle-class teenagers of the 1990s, I was raised in a color-blind atmosphere, and taught to respect everybody equally, regardless of race or social status. Unfortunately, color-blindness can lead to the numbing of the intellect on the grounds of the „politically correct': as it strives to homogenize realities, it nurtures a distorted sense of what reality actually is and implies as a lived experience. By 1992, Toni Morrison had perceived the threat of color-blindness and had articulated its risks:

> When matters of race are located and called attention to in American literature, critical response has tended to be on the order of the humanistic nostrum – or a dismissal mandated by the label „political.' Excising the political from the life of the mind is a sacrifice that has proven costly. I think of this erasure as a kind of hypochondria always curing itself with unnecessary surgery. A criticism that needs to insist that literature is not only „universal' but also „race free' risks lobotomizing that literature, and diminishes both art and the artist. (1992: 12)

Race is forcefully present at the axis of jazz and jazz literature, and it actively operates at a mythopoeic level. There is no room for color-blindness in an analysis of jazz or blues-idiomatic literature, especially with myth at the epicenter of the issue. To counteract color-blindness, I have been honest with how I feel this dissertation should be structured, and with how far I can stretch my own poetic license.

I begin with these remarks not with the object of presenting an apologetic note, but because I have found that one of the frequent norms to jazz-oriented scholarship is to begin by providing one's credentials. One's race and one's musical background (even regardless of the fact that the subject matter may be of a literary, not of a musical, nature), for better or for worse, are strong pillars through which to legitimize authority. This convention is helpful to introduce what the reader will find are recurrent issues throughout this study, for it greatly illustrates much of what jazz as a cultural construct is about: race, gender, appropriation, authenticity, and myth.

The object of this dissertation is to examine the mythopoeic intricacies involved in the representation of jazz in discursive forms ranging from fiction to non-fiction, from journalism to documentary film. I use Laurence Coupe's distinction between mythography and mythopoeia as the starting point. Coupe defines mythopoeia as those literary works "tending to create or re-create certain narratives which human beings take to be crucial to their understanding of their world" (2009: 4), or, in other words, "the capacity to produce myths and to provide a model of the world" (2009: 34). Mythography, on the other hand, is "the interpretation of myth" (2009: 4); it requires the scholar to read "which paradigms are of interest, and how to interpret them" (2009: 13). My role, therefore, is that of a mythographer, as I attempt to decipher the manner by which myth colonizes jazz and the blues idiom to create a cultural construct, one composed of a series of images aiming towards universal representation and eternalization.

I have chosen to deal with several genres as part of the corpus because my aim is not to establish the mythopoeic tendencies of jazz solely at a literary level, but to attempt to grasp the impact that these narratives had at a cultural scale. It is hard to say whether the narrative corpus which is the material for analysis has determined the methodological approach or vice versa. I am inclined to claim that the upcoming analysis is a result of both; the novels, the autobiography, stories, newspaper clippings, and the documentary called for a specific approach that would not neglect or undermine their aims at the time of their publication. After all, if we are to decipher the mythopoeic proclivities of these narratives, we must be coherent with their intentionality as much as with their context. (For this reason, the reader will find that while some chapters focus

almost exclusively on the narrative at hand, other chapters draw on biographical details about the writers or storytellers to procure further discussion and justify what claims I have made on their mythopoeic tendencies.) At the same time, the theoretical frameworks to which I adhere, which for the most part are the result of more recent scholarship than the corpus of analysis, have persuasively led to a filtering of material commanding a painstaking selection of works. This doubly processed modus operandi has kept, I believe, this dissertation from reductive pretensions susceptible to the proclaiming of universal forms. There are simply too many jazz and blues novels, too many short stories (hundreds of which were only published once, falling thereafter into the limbo of lost literary pieces) and thousands of press commentaries and clips to expound any belief in monolithic absolutism. To settle in such a blind ambition towards perfection and completion would not only remove me from my comfort zone as a beginner in literary scholarship, but would moreover irremediably violate the very raison d'être of this study. If, as Kenneth Burke argues, myth is symbolic language with an intrinsic impulse towards perfection, with a drive towards full development,[1] then such an attempt on my part would resemble mythopoeia, not mythography. Keeping a conscious avoidance of ecumenicalism in mind, what this dissertation proposes is to explore and explain the mystifying structure to which a number of representative works of their time are prone to. These structures are depicted in order to illustrate and expose the main mythopoeic displays in jazz and blues-idiomatic writing. The analysis is purely descriptive, as opposed to prescriptive, and incites, I hope, further discussion about the workings of myth within jazz literature or other aesthetic mediums.

A second requirement that is imperative for the study is to bear in mind that the corpus of analysis is not jazz or blues music, but representations of the same in narrative and storytelling vehicles of expression and their impact at a cultural level. Contrary to previous critics and New Jazz Studies and myth scholars (who have mainly focused their work around behavioral patterns in jazz circles, jazz criticism, jazz imagery through photography and discography, and the canon), this dissertation takes literary and documentary narrative as the sovereign vessels through which myth-making can be channeled. Undoubtedly, there exist a number of academic works about jazz literature – Jon Panish's *The Color of Jazz* (1997) is a notable example of recent outstanding insight

[1] Burke illustrates this compulsion through the Aristotelian principle of entelechy, according to which every being "aims at the perfection natural to its kind" (1966: 17).

on jazz literature. But an analysis of the mergence between jazz, narrative, and myth and the codes by which it is orchestrated was yet to be accomplished, and has therefore left some space for the development of new academic expostulations that may contribute to the complexity and unstoppably growing field of New Jazz Studies. To approach expressions of an aesthetic within another aesthetic form can sometimes misguide the mythographer, leading him or her to confusing results. Indeed, when we undertake a Barthean framework, each of the aesthetic signs can more easily be categorized within its own medium precisely because we are focused on the dimensions of a metalanguage; that is, to become a Barthean reader of myths, alertness to more than one linguistic code is a prerequisite. But when we adopt, for example, a sole ritualistic scope over the representation of jazz in a certain excerpt, the boundaries are often blurred. The mythographer is tempted to slide into a consideration of rituals in actual performances, hence overlooking the artifices and rhetorical strategies employed in literature to reproduce or emulate the rite, which tend to follow conventionalized stylistic patterns that answer to the grand narrative of jazz as much as actual performances do. Furthermore, the longing to read a certain piece under the prism of jazz can also be deceptive. Fritz Gysin touches upon this problematic issue by describing the tendentious way in which critics search for metaphors and equivalents between the two aesthetics. “Not only is the choice among useable Jazz elements extremely wide,” Gysin notes, “but the terminology is also conveniently vague, so that almost anything under the sun can be characterized as a solo, an arrangement, an improvisation, a riff, a bridge, etc.” (2002: 275). To mitigate such propensity, Gysin proposes to focus exclusively on “texts which thematize the music in some way or other or which at least contain signals which allow the critic to read them in this particular manner” (2002: 275). Gysin’s stance has provided an additional filter for the selection of the corpus, reducing the material to writing which if not directly centered on jazz, it is at least transparently allusive to it. To have done otherwise would have entailed a deviation from the topic of this thesis altogether; there is no room in this study to identify what classifies as blues-idiomatic writing and what does not. The selected material for analysis, therefore, is assumed to be jazz-based or in the very least, jazz-oriented.

Part 1 is intended to function as a more in-depth introduction into the field of jazz studies. I begin by providing an overview of early jazz non-fiction (mainly jazz

histories and jazz-oriented social commentary potrayed in essays and journalistic pieces) so as to present the reader with the basic issues and binarisms around which the discourse revolved. The reader unacquainted with jazz writing will find this section a helpful source to return to at certain points throughout the rest of this dissertation. I then turn to explain the reasons behind the emergence of New Jazz Studies, what such a field entails, and what criticism it has generated. In the third item I discuss five recent representative works of jazz mythography and mythopoeia to show what research has been done so far and to give the reader a glimpse of the many possibilities of studying the jazz-myth combination. In the last item, I present some basic definitions of what will be the recurrent terminology throughout the remainder of the dissertation, including the highly elusive concept of myth itself.

The rest of this study is dedicated to three units of analysis, each of which is approached through a different methodological, mythographic standpoint. Part 2 undertakes a Barthean framework and is centered around negative myths and stereotyping of jazz and its musicians. Most of the texts that will be considered belong to white writers; in spite of initial efforts to not divide this thesis between black and white sources, the fact remains that in the first decades of jazz writing a number of general tendencies revealing sentiments stretching from awe and fascination to a sound rejection prevail in white texts. From the 1920s to the Beat Generation, the veil with which jazz is condescendingly looked upon cannot be ignored, and if that means having to separate units between black and white writing, then so be it. It would be interesting to try out Leonard Feather's blindfold tests of early jazz narratives among literary scholars and survey the results to evaluate a group's sense and understanding of the cultural construct of race; such an enterprise would be very revealing of the myths surrounding jazz and how they might be shared or negotiated between the two races.[2] It

[2] Feather's famed blindfold tests were conducted in *Metrononome* (beginning in 1946) and afterwards in *Down Beat* (beginning in 1951) under the column "The Jazzman as Critic: The Blindfold Test." The test consisted in playing a recording for a musician to comment and attempt to identify. Since the musician had no information as to the players, he or she was to evaluate the tone, rhythm, timbre, and other stylistic features of musicianship at both a solo and an ensemble level to make an educated guess. Although race was not necessarily the central issue, the way the test was arranged indirectly prompted an evaluation of the differences between white and black players. In the well-known blindfold testing of Roy Eldridge in 1960, Feather reported that the trumpet player "made a bet with me that he would be able to distinguish white musicians from Negroes. He did not even guess the 50% to which the

is difficult to ascertain the quantitative and qualitative exactness of how influential prior knowledge of the writer's ethnic background is over mythographic judgment. Although many texts are conspicuously transparent as to the racial distance between author and content, the mythographer may confront more ambiguous examples in which he or she may succumb to being biased by his knowledge on the writer's race. Nonetheless, after a careful reading of the material, over which I have consciously made an effort to keep an open mind and be as objective as possible, I am inclined to think that there are indeed substantial, identifiable stylistic discernments pertaining to black and white jazz mythopoeia.

My convictions after this self-imposed assessment dictated the structure that this study ought to follow as well as the type of mythographic methodology that should be applied for each section. Roland Barthes's mystifying theory, as presented in *Mythologies* (1957), has gained a prevalent spot for comprehending interracial politics in jazz in the work of a number of scholars. I continue to use Barthes's theory on mystification so as to examine the bourgeois ideology implicit in the representation of the music that deepens the gap between the dominant culture and the „other' through the naturalization of historical causality. Although a Barthean methodology may initially

---

law of averages entitled him" (2001: 215). However, at the end of the session, throughout which Eldridge has vacillated in his judgments, he still seems convinced that interracial replicas could be discerned if one is to attend closely to individual styles. Eldridge is quoted stating that:

> I guess I'll have to go along with you, Leonard – you can't tell just from listening to records. But I still say that I could spot a white imitator of a colored musician immediately. A white musician trying to copy Hawkins, for instance. And, in the same way, I suppose I could recognize a colored cat trying to copy Bud Freeman. I can only talk about individual sounds that have made it, highly individual sounds. (Qtd. Feather 2001: 216)

Eldridge's test is often cited to prove the inconclusiveness and unreliability of shared beliefs regarding the differences between white and black jazzmen. In compliance with this model, Professor Lewis Porter of Rutgers University conducts racially-based blindfold tests in his graduate classes so that students may introspectively assess their own preconceptions about jazz players. The object is not to identify the soloist or the ensemble, but merely to evaluate whether the players are white or black. Students are asked to consider such conjectures as the notion that African Americans have more 'swing' and rhythmic versatility than whites, who are often conceived as having a slightly stiffer, more controlled manner of playing. In this way, the students balance their own individual assumptions with those that form the shared knowledge of the music.

seem outdated, it proves to be efficiently useful not so much for its semiologic deconstructionism as for its adherence to competing categories of race and class in a way that allows the myth of primitivism to absorb, but not be limited to, ritualistic contemplations paramount to ethnographic and anthropological studies. I attempt to establish rituals as the most visible manifestations that provided white writers with the foundations to build their sometimes negative and sometimes exotic myths surrounding jazz.

In order to explore the intricacies of the construct of primitive ritualism, I begin by analyzing the functionings of the rhetorical devices operating in the process of mystification. To exemplify such processes, I attend to excerpts and clippings from early jazz criticism and journalism through which I can map out the pervading mystifying discourse subduing and attempting to gain exclusive control over the jazz and blues idiom. Having viewed these linguistic structures, I then turn to the manifestation of jazz exoticism in Carl Van Vechten's highly controversial novel, *Nigger Heaven* (1926), which not only epitomizes jazz primitivism in fictional form, but also serves as an ideal point of departure from which to initiate the discussion surrounding the problematic issues of authority and authenticity, which are central to the connection between jazz, myth, and authorship. The following item deals with the narrative strategies employed by Mezz Mezzrow in his autobiography, *Really the Blues* (1946), and by Beat writer John Clellon Holmes in his 1958 novel, *The Horn*. As I continue with the ongoing discussion about exoticist representations of jazz rituals and the authorial investment of mystifying discourse involved, I also use these texts to suggest the existence of unifying elements binding the impressions and worldviews of as socially remote writers as the excentric socialite Van Vechten and the hipster-oriented Mezzrow and Holmes. In following the jazz monomyths they portray, there emerge alternative, more subtle commentaries that indicate a fascination with jazz that bears some resemblance to the de-historicizing attempts of the mystifying discourse of the bourgeoisie.

Part 3 deals with narratives in which a more constructive understanding of jazz and the blues idiom is projected. Negative stereotypes are revoked and destroyed to offer more positive and affirmative images of blackness and African American music. This stance should not necessarily be deemed as just a reactive abolishment of the white dominant ideology's conceptions of the music; although this is the mission that some

writers undertake, others endorse an approbatory, heroic image of the blues idiom because the very nature of the music demands it. In these cases, the mythopoeic method stems foremost from the aesthetic's own entreaties, and is only secondarily meant to counteract white assumptions. To reduce jazz music and jazz writing to a crisscrossing of responses and rebounds between races is to underestimate the complexities in the dialectics inherent to the construction of racial identities. African American literary and musical theories resist the pigeonholing compartmentalization of their arts as mere tools aiming to justify their grandeur in the eyes of white hierarchical systems or even as mediums through which to articulate a repudiation of such systems. Above all, they should be interpreted as articulations of a uniqueness that is simply there, and that has in great part evolved as a result of shifting aesthetic conceptions that are isolated from matters of racial competitiveness.

With this premise in mind, I use Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s Signifyin(g) Theory as the overall framework from which to deconstruct the mythemes that conform the general jazz narrative followed by a number of black jazz writers. Gates's method has been applied by jazz scholars to illustrate the means through which musicians repeat and reinvent previous pieces by way of a signal difference to either create a form of pastiche or to parody the earlier work to which they are referring. It has additionally been used as a solid theory through which to trace the literary influences between African American writers, hence fostering the establishment of a self-nurturing tradition based on an organic dialogue between past and present expression. My objective is to utilize Signifyin(g) Theory under a new prism that may not only blend both literature and the music, but may also serve a mythographic purpose. Although Signifyin(g) Theory is not essentially oriented towards mythology, there are a number of key issues described by Gates which are helpful for an elucidation of the semantics and sub-structures on which distinctive African American mythemes and archetypes are founded. The folk stories of the Monkey, the Lion, and the Elephant illuminate the format of jazz rituals and the way these are perpetuated through writing, and motivated and unmotivated signifying can themselves be read in mythopoeic terms as linguistic devices charged with an intentionality that answers to certain mythemes and archetypes. As we will see, these mythopoeic games sometimes blend African American and Eurocentric traditions, and sometimes rely solely on black aesthetic expression itself.

Using Signifyin(g) Theory as a mythographic device, I analyze Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982), Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) and Albert Murray's non-fiction and *Train Whistle Guitar* (1974). I do not follow a chronological order due to the fact that Ellison's and Murray's novels will best bridge the path towards the contents included in Part 4. Hence, beginning with Walker's text, I consider the potential of the classical blues singers to be considered as „race' women, as black feminists or as both categories. Additionally, the character of Shug Avery emerges as a literary instrument through which to render equal consideration of the components of binary systems possible. By destroying the hierarchy underlying the antinomies, Walker creates the womanist presence that defines itself through the rhetoric of signifying and the art of parody and pastiche. Contrary to the gender-based preoccupations of Walker, Ellison and Murray develop the notion of the blues idiom as the language of heroism, where a series of rituals leading to the success and victorious outcome of the individual are inscribed. The section dedicated to *Invisible Man* focuses on Ellison's position as an African American artist within the wider scope of Western letters, and the debate of the significance of black arts and black individual talent within the tradition of canonical Western literature. With this in mind, I attend to the character of Louis Armstrong in *Invisible Man* to defend the type of rhetorical games of signifying that Ellison, I believe, was attempting to portray, and which bear a close resemblance with T.S. Eliot's understanding of tradition. In the analysis of *Train Whistle Guitar*, I continue with some of the ideas purported by Ellison and expanded on by Murray to illustrate the signifying games encoded in the many rituals of the blues performance. Murray not only understands these rituals as acts of counterstament related to black folklore as much as to the Western epic; his blues characters in the novels follow the monomyth of the type of heroism of which the blues idiom is a cryptogram.

Part 4 is based on an analysis of jazz and the blues idiom through the more current scope of mythistory, as established by historiographers William McNeill and Joseph Mali. Such a methodology sheds light on a new way to interpret the canon and the grand jazz narrative, which are issues that, either directly or indirectly, have appeared in the discussions carried out in Part 1, Part 2, and Part 3. Contrary to the previous sections, however, Part 4 focuses solely on the well-known documentary *Jazz* (2000), directed by renowned film-maker Ken Burns, as the corpus. *Jazz* has had an inmense impact in the music's influence on American culture in the past decade; by

bringing it to the forefront of the discussion, we may better comprehend not only how the jazz and blues-idiomatic discourse has evolved since the beginning of the twentieth century, but how the antinomies embedded within the metalanguage of mystification and the intertextuality of signifying operate in the present mainstream conception of jazz and are enlivened through the audiovisual syntax of the film.

While Tony Whyton (2010) and a handful of other New Jazz scholars have attacked the Great Man Theory chronicling of the music's history in *Jazz*, I attend to this approach from within the mythopoeic scope of mythistory, so as to expose the symbiotic operation of both theories within jazz historiography. Defying the ratiocinative basis of historicism, mythistory conveys a virtual understanding of the past that combines fact, truth and myth in compliance with social memory and the racial politics on which it rests. Burns's careful selection of anecdotes to mark critical moments in the history of jazz, his telling choices of representative men and women, his adherence to a patriarchal narrative frame, his portrayal of spaces under the paradigms of genesis and apocalypse, and his cyclical representation of time and tradition offer a dramatic story of jazz deliberately bound to the notion of order. Indeed, the documentary must not be read as an accurate narrative, but as an interpretation of America and the racial politics that define the nation. Jazz is a pretext through which to address the complicated negotiations between racial identities whilst in celebration of the American melting pot. As disparaging as the criticism has been against the documentary, we find through a mythistoric approach that Burns's is quite a modernist standpoint on historicism, and that the construction of a history (as opposed to a reconstruction of history) has been condemned by jazz circles because of its devotion to such concerns as legitimacy, authenticity and purism.

Each of these three methodologies will be examined in-depth at the beginning of each unit to provide the reader with the necessary tools to follow the analyses. Other mythographic approaches may occasionally be used to support or further certain speculations or just to supply a possible interpretative counterpoint to avoid claims of universality. As will become clear, ritualistic theories of myth ranging from as back as Sir James Frazer to Malinowski, from T.S. Eliot and André Malraux to Joseph Campbell, Kenneth Burke, Thomas Carlyle, and even to structuralist Lévi-Strauss, contribute penetrating thoughts that enrich the cornucopia of sources with which we will be dealing.

PART 1

THE ACADEMIC PATH TOWARDS JAZZ MYTHOGRAPHY

In the last decades, scholars have shown a growing concern for the unveiling of the dominant jazz narrative, and have undertaken the task of questioning not only its paradigmatic figures and „great men,' but also the underlying weavings that have fabricated a jazz canon that has invariably germinated within the academic fields of musicology, the humanities, and education. Doubtless, myth has increasingly gained a central position within current jazz and blues research; it has become a sort of touchstone, the methodological point of departure from which to approach the disparate issues and intricacies affecting the jazz field. In this sense, one could argue that current scholars are inclined towards mythography, that is, an analytical stance in search of the cardinal foundations of myth itself, so as to decipher its functioning and its deriving interpretations. We must be cautious, however, in assuming that today's jazz-oriented works answer solely to a mythographic agenda. The fact remains that mythopoeia, that is, the creation and nourishment of a series of narrative beliefs to be transmitted and believed in by the culture at hand, also survives as a prevalent form of expression in

much of today's blues-idiomatic discourse. Part 4 of this thesis, for example, focuses on the mythopoeic potential of Ken Burns's highly controversial documentary, *Jazz*, as an example of the powerful effort on the part of countless scholars and musicians to sustain (as opposed to decipher) myth's convincing, ordering abilities. Mythography and mythopoeia, although conceived as somewhat contradictory standpoints, often overlap. It is often the case that one's mythographic stance is perceived as mythopoeia by another critic. Myth, in other words, and whether intentionally or not, is frequently counteracted by myth.

Despite current contesting forces between mythography and mythopoeia, when it comes to the academic field, a diachronic view invariably leads us to conclude that as jazz studies became more specialized, so did mythography as authorial purpose, for the most part, overshadow mythopoeia. In other words, the current pervading intention of jazz scholars is mythographic, even if their work is deemed by others as mythopoeic. It is therefore necessary to address the general tendency with which myth has been gravitationally pulled towards the core center of scholars' methodology, or in other words, the proclivity towards a mythography that exposes jazz and the blues idiom as a social construct, a contextualized aesthetic that must resist isolated representations that endorse the blind belief in a monolithic meaning of the music. The number of published works focusing on jazz mythography in recent decades, and particularly since 2000, indicate the refusal to accept the dominant narrative and the canon, submitting instead to the relativism of history and aesthetics in an effort to salvage the architectural nature of jazz and the blues idiom as a social construct. Hence, the selected corpus for this section illustrates the general path through which scholarship has evolved from mythopoeia to mythography.

A diachronic comprehension of current emblematic scholarly texts will not only allow us to grasp the key notions adhering to jazz myth and their implicit relationship to modern American social history, but will moreover reflect the open, dynamic dialectic between past and present appreciations of jazz. It is precisely contemporary revisionism, the questioning and critical stance of previous authorial voices, which weakens the dominant jazz narrative, hence driving the shifting appreciations of jazz and myth to a perpetual flux of interpretations. This open dialogue between past and present, often to take the form of heated exchanges between passionate advocates, will reappear time and again throughout this dissertation, for only through a scrutiny of competing mythopoeic

and mythographic views can we begin to apprehend the iron fist of myth gripping jazz the blues idiom even today. Traces of contesting sub-traditions, nurtured by anecdotes and hearsay, will become more evident as we later on discuss the binary oppositions dwelling beneath and beyond blues-idiomatic fiction and non-fiction.

For now, suffice to present the progressive interest in myth within jazz studies, and to show the different understandings of myth that these scholars have launched. In order to do so, I will begin with a schematic introduction to jazz histories and journalism from the 1920s until the emergence of New Jazz Studies. Let me clarify that during this first period, the written material is arguably the product of scholarship. I am inclined, however, to now and again use the terms „scholarly' and „scholarship' because, contrary to some views that refuse to classify these works as such, I believe that despite many of the writers' non-academic background and despite the hesitancy to feature jazz journalism as a reliable, objective source, a considerable effort was put into adopting a scholarly discourse. Moreover, as biased by journalism as this first period was, it constitutes the vast legacy of written material that current scholars have necessarily had to work with, for it is only in recent years that jazz and the blues idiom have carved their way into the academic sphere. Thus, this initial overview will allow us to gain perspective on some of the myths that defined early jazz writing and would be revised from the 1980s onwards. Later on in this dissertation I will elaborate on the myths and stereotypes presented in these early depictions of jazz; however, an introductory note on their inclinations is crucial to comprehend contemporary scholarly dedication to mythography.

1.1. A Brief Overview of Jazz Histories, Jazz-Oriented Social Criticism, and their Myths

In 1926, Henry Osgood published *So This Is Jazz,* marking the beginning of what would evolve into an obsession to trace and establish the true origin of jazz and the blues idiom. Osgood was conscious of the originality of his endeavor; he claimed to have been persuaded by H.L. Mencken to write about the topic, and to have used two articles published in *American Mercury* as the point of departure. Although Osgood's work can hardly be considered a reliable source on jazz history, and has continuously been neglected by historiographers, probably due to its lack of correctness and biased support of white symphonic jazz, it is interesting to note that some of the same issues troubling Osgood would still occupy jazz scholars ninety years later. The high art / popular culture dichotomy appears to be the writer's primary pursuit, one which leads him to proclaim certain white musicians as the true exponents of jazz as art, at the expense of black musicians and conductors. He reinstates Paul Whiteman as the "King of Jazz" and refers to Gershwin as the "White Hope" throughout the book.

Already in the foreword, Osgood touches on two other crucial matters:

> It is quite difficult to get accurate and authenticated information about the beginnings of jazz, recent as these beginnings are. Until our little group of serious thinkers . . . began to take up jazz in a serious way, it was *démodé*, *declassé* and several other things in French – the idle and vulgar amusement of the *bourgeoisie*. . . . In the early days an occasional young reporter, short of anything else to write about, would drag a story about jazz out of one of its exponents, serving it up with a sauce of its own imagination that might heighten its picturesqueness, though sure to lessen its accuracy. (1926: vii)

In these lines, Osgood conjures the problematic debate over the authorial voice of jazz. As we will see, writing has often been the preferential medium through which to declare not only who has a right to write or talk about jazz, but moreover whose opinion is worthy of respect or not. In Osgood's case, authority is credited to his group of "serious thinkers," while dismissing working-class reporters as inadequate sources. Osgood of course overlooks the fact that the upper-class concert hall is not jazz's natural, immediate scenario. Nonetheless, like many of his contemporaries, he understood that if jazz was to be considered by any means an art, it was up to the elite to magnify its potential within tasteful venues. Because of their educated insight into aesthetic theory,

only privileged intellectuals should be allowed to investigate and fathom on the meaning of the idiom. Intrinsically bound to the problem of authority was the hopelessly vacillating division between high art and entertainment. The first recordings of the 1920s had erupted at the same time that other aesthetic avant-gardes shocked the public with extremist forms of experimentation. From Cubism, Expressionism, Futurism, Surrealism and Dadaism, to the implosion of stream of consciousness and interior monologue techniques in the literature of Stein, Eliot, Joyce and Pound, virtually all insurgent aesthetic codes were microscopically analyzed for the sake of reaching a comprehensive theory on which forms were worthy, universal voicings of refined civilization and which could downright be dismissed for their lack of intellectually-based taste and sophistication. In order to justify whatever minimum amount of quality art he finds in jazz, Osgood resolves not only to allude to his educated social circle, but is also prepared to depict the music from Western standards of aesthetic perfection. Indeed, authority (and its concomitant problem, ownership) still constitute one of the essential problems regarding jazz writing today, and through the decades it has evolved into a controversy not solely dependent on matters of class status. Race, ethnicity, gender, professional background, musicianship and virtuosity as a musician are just a number of other prominent categories from which the debate often soars.

The second issue that Osgood alludes to is the tendency to mystify jazz; already in the 1920s writers are aware of the music's susceptibility to myth, fantasy, and the caprices of story-making. The very title of the book, *So This Is Jazz*, seems to address the need to classify, categorize, order, and subdue the phenomenon that had cacophonously christened the decade. The roaring twenties of the Jazz Age had to be deciphered, demystified, and reduced to simpler dichotomies if jazz was to survive in any way as an art form. Needless to say, as Osgood self-proclaimed himself as an authorial voice and as his content was strongly biased by racial interest, there is little mythographic or historic objectiveness to grace his conclusions. However, regardless of the book's questionable worthiness as a jazz history, it collected and alluded to the basic antinomies that would be discussed for years to come. As I will attempt to demonstrate throughout this study, today, the black / white and high art / entertainment dichotomies still permeate the jazz discourse; authority and authenticity continue to fragment and dismember unifying perspectives, and despite growing academic interest in

mythography, mythopoeic narratives and representations of jazz are still strongly delivered to the mainstream.

Following *So This Is Jazz* came a number of jazz histories, more carefully documented, that classically embody the genesis of jazz scholarly thought. Amongst these studies were Hugues Panassié's *Hot Jazz* (1936), which had been published in France two years before under the title *Le Jazz Hot*, Charles Delauney's *Hot Discography* (1936), Winthrop Sargeant's *Jazz, Hot and Hybrid* (1938), Frederic Ramsey Jr.'s and Charles Edward Smith's *Jazzmen* (1939), and Wilder Hobson's *American Jazz Music* (1939). These writers, for the most part, belonged to the white educated classes and were affiliated to leftist movements as a heated response to the growing threat of fascism. They shared the common obsession with unearthing the cultural roots of jazz and articulating its debt to its origins: the influence of the blues and West African music, and the location and description of key geographical coordinates were capital to reach the meaning of the music as the voice of proletarians and the oppressed race. Many of these works included illustrations and pictures to support their evidence and their defense of the black race as the originator of the idiom. However, it was precisely their effort to exalt blackness and undermine white culture's role in the development of jazz which eventually backfired with hostility. In Randall Sandke's words,

> Such a view may strike many today as an example of „liberal racism'; that is, it was meant to show understanding and respect for blacks but was in fact limiting and patronizing. This paternalistic outlook, as it became more widely accepted, would produce restrictive stereotypes for both black and white musicians. Blacks were hindered in finding acceptance in the concert, studio, and mainstream pop fields, and whites were negatively typecast within the jazz world. (2010: 18)

Indeed, blackness and whiteness had soon enough become central categories from which to define what was jazz, to argue whether it could be construed as a high art or was condemned to remain an expression of popular culture, and to enhance certain geniuses as the aesthetic's messiahs. Even the still faint mathematics of musicology could not seem to free jazz from racial myths and stereotypes. Panassié's second book, *The Real Jazz* (1942), did little to ameliorate the widely spread belief in the musical superiority of the noble black race. The history of jazz was hence dialectically

constructed as a series of racial actions and reactions. According to Panassié, the gap between „true' and „false' jazz, that is, between the authentic form and the faulty, degrading imitation delivered by whites, stemmed from competing racial categories that simultaneously reflected the old battle between the powerful and the unprivileged. Consider, for example, the following excerpt in which Panassié discusses the commercialization of jazz during the Depression:

> An additional reason for abandoning their own music in favor of the sentimental twaddle of the whites was the Negro's inferiority complex, a complex for which white oppression is entirely to blame. For years the Negro had watched the white reach the most important positions, had felt the oppressive domination of this famous „civilization' and had listened to the whites proclaim their superiority from the rooftops. What could be more natural than his assumption that the things which the white man liked must necessarily have a greater value than those he liked? And certainly to imitate and assimilate such influences was to share, in a limited way, with the dominant culture. Therefore he wanted to share the white man's taste for music, and as a musician he sought to conquer this „superior' race by conforming to the methods of the successful white artists. Thus little by little he lost his own native qualities. But what the Negro didn't see was that an unrestrained publicity rather than personal merit had brought to fame the most mediocre white orchestras and singers, not only in the United States but throughout the world. The Negro who had originally been purer and closer to nature than the whites, was continually perverted by them. (2005: 52-53)

Panassié's words, though intended to support and complement the genuineness of African American art, are clearly condescending in more ways than one. His view was shared by other jazz historians who deemed primitiveness as a virtue and lamented the negative connotations it aroused. Rudi Blesh, for example, celebrates the primitiveness of the authentic blues form whilst complaining that „primitive' is "a term which has unfortunately become associated with the crude and barbarous" (1946: 108). Nonetheless, Blesh's acclamation of primitiveness implies an infantilism inherent to blackness. In another section he writes that the term indicates "a way of looking at the world innocently, directly and imaginatively. Like the primitivism of children, it sees without veils and records in its own peculiar, powerful, magical symbols" (1946: 12-13). It is easy to see that the Rousseau-like characterization of blacks as specimens untainted by the moral corruption brought on by industrialism and capitalist interests reflects not only the pretentious indulgence of the dominant race's standpoint, but also

foreshadows the white race's own inferiority complex that would eventually become a target of criticism against the Beat Generation.

The myth of the innocent, noble savage is furthered by Panassié's conjectures on the imitative response between races. The French author's assumption that blacks sought to please the „superior race' by imitating white jazz (itself a degraded copy of the authentic, black source) recalls Thomas Jefferson's stereotyping of Negroes as uncreative, pathologically imitative creatures.[3] The dialectic dynamism of aesthetic mimesis would remain an intense topic of research in the jazz field for decades; writers such as Ralph Ellison, Amiri Baraka, and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., as we will see, would rescue the process from these negative conventions through their vindication of the mythical trickster figure and the linguistic tropes of signifying.

An additional argument paramount to jazz studies is also depicted in Panassié's statements. He suggests a spiral-like movement in this imitative game towards an inevitable mediocrity of jazz; unless emancipated from hierarchical class and race systems, the music is prophetically condemned to perversion. Indeed, the debate on whether the evolution of jazz displayed aesthetic progression or stagnation proved to be one of the principal concerns of these early jazz histories, particularly in the advent of bop. The obsessive nature of most jazz historians and early record collectors to identify and establish the true origins of the music led to the classification of styles in accordance to virtue of purity and faithfulness to roots. In the late 1930s, musicians and cultists of the 1920s New Orleans style reacted against the excesses of the highly commercialized swing movement of big bands and Tin Pan Alley repertoires. Blesh particularly took on a quasi-militant tone in his reproaches:

[3] Despite the book's flaws, Panassié's life-long efforts to establish jazz as a worthy, serious art form is and should continue to be acknowledged. His ardent faith in the musical and mythical qualities of the idiom led him in 1935 to found the first magazine in the world exclusively dedicated to jazz, *Jazz Hot.* Panassié best incarnated the fascination that many Frenchmen displayed towards the music and which would result, particularly during the 1930s and 1940s, in several publications stemming from an aesthetically cultivated European background. In the mid-1960s, David Strauss attested to the yet palpable sense of indebtedness to these writers in the United States and in Europe when he stated that "the fact that jazz received serious attention in France before American intellectuals paid court to it has been a matter of pride for French intellectuals" (1965: 585).

> Bitterest fighters, at the last ditch, are many swing musicians from the most corrupt to the veritable tyro. Their motivation is apparent: commercial self-interest, inability to play the highly difficult, creative parts of jazz, the illusion of progress in swing in itself, the blinding glare of acclaim whipped up by high-powered publicity salesmanship. (1946: 288)

The fixation with authenticity was no longer a sole matter of race, but also of style and performance. New Orleans revivalists did not limit their scope to small combo performances in urban nightclubs, where they celebrated the tunes of Jelly Roll Morton, Joe Oliver, Sidney Bechet, Bunk Johnson, Bix Beiderbecke, and Armstrong and his Hot Five; once again on the grounds of purity, they sought to get the public's attention through small publications. According to Bernard Gendron, "[New Orleans revivalists] set themselves off as the only authentic alternatives to the two dominant mainstream jazz journals, *Down Beat* and *Metronome*, which were altogether beholden to the swing phenomenon" (1999: 32).

It was not long before the swing movement found itself relegated to the same position as the revivalists. The early 1940s jazz scenario was shattered with the birth of a new school that broke with all the conventions of swing. The revolution of bebop subverted the harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic etiquettes of swing and violently launched the meticulously arranged approaches envisioned by its head theorist, Dizzy Gillespie. Among other innovations, the preferential interval was to be the flatted fifth, which until then had traditionally been serendipitously used to evoke a dissonant effect. Speed and harmonic complexity characterized the solos, which could be mechanically prolonged throughout several bars of eighth and sixteenth notes, usually in the 4/4 time signature. These musicological implosions demolished the melodic and rhythmic predictability that had permitted swing to rise as dance music. Indeed, bop transformed jazz audibly and visibly in many ways, but what I would like to emphasize for now is its impact on jazz writers' preoccupation with the evolution of the idiom. For extensive groups of listeners and New Orleans enthusiasts, the frenetic nervousness of the new sound represented a violation of traditional jazz taste. Gillespie's response was an insistence that "jazz was evolving and not rebelling" (Giddins 1998: 283). The battle between the old and the new styles often appeared in print. In 1947, for instance, music critic Barry Ulanov published an article in *Metronome* under the provocative title of "Moldy Figs vs. Moderns!" Mockingly, Ulanov attacked the decadent, deteriorated taste of Dixieland advocates (the nickname „Moldy Fig' would stick for decades). Recreating

a radio-transmitted encounter with New Orleans purist Rudi Blesh, Ulanov referred to the setting as a "ring," and called each troop to combat: "[it] is the time for all good jazz fans to come to the aid of their music . . . Choose your own weapon!" (2001: 137, 138). The British jazz pianist and journalist Leonard Feather, also a contributor and co-editor of *Metronome* throughout the ensuing campaigns, would publish the first book on bop, *Inside Jazz*, in 1949.

As highly opinionated jazz writers, journalists and collectors enrolled in the picketing of conflicting schools, the issue of progress, which until then had been treated by scholars as tangential to the myth of the noble savage, the high art / entertainment antinomy, and the matter of authenticity, became the analytical nucleus of one of the most celebrated jazz histories, André Hodeir's *Jazz: Its Evolution and Essence* (1956).[4] Following André Malraux and T.S. Eliot, Hodeir conceived jazz as a tradition that had followed the gestation characteristic of other classic arts; namely, he refers to a period of growth, a period of maturity, and a period of decline. As John Gennari points out, Hodeir succeeded in breaking with the stigmatic axiom propounded by Panassié that jazz was affixed as a primitive art: "whereas Panassié considered jazz itself a primitive art form, Hodeir sees jazz as rooted in primitive art but ever straining to transcend it and achieve more and more of the systematic intellectual coherence of civilized art" (1991: 481). In Hodeir's view, the idiom was in a constant flux where different forces operated. Sometimes the transition towards more mature styles ran smoothly, while other times a titanic clash of aesthetic interests (here Hodeir refers specifically to the battle between modernists and revivalists) somewhat decelerated the process, freeze-framing the possibility of ramifying a single art into several schools.

Although Hodeir's history is not mythopoeic in the way that Osgood's, Panassié's, or Delauney's works were, his predication of a necessary diachronic, evolutionary conception of the idiom is suggestive of two other antinomies closely related to mythical systems. On the one hand, as we have seen above, stands the dualism between progress and stagnation: two teleological possibilities for jazz are established. Despite any art's final downfall into a period of decline, a linear understanding of time implies that the art answers to a final purpose, even if that

[4] 1956 was also the year that Marshall Stearns published *The Story of Jazz*, a new history that provided fresh insights from the field of ethnomusicology whilst absorbing Melville Herskovit's theories on anthropology.

purpose is merely the urge to perfect itself. Contrary to this destiny is the notion of stagnation, which mirrors in a sense the archaic rendition of time as circular, ever to repeat itself. As we will see throughout this study, this binarism is recurrently associated to blues-idiomatic rituals and is often reflected in jazz fiction.

Hodeir's second antinomy stems as well from his defense of a diachronic approach to jazz. Hodeir captures the more or less violent transitions from one style or epoch to another not only by surveying time in terms of the maturity of the technique itself, but by binding jazz's evolution to the idea of legacy between generations. Take for instance the following comparison between Louis Armstrong and Roy Eldridge:

> Ten years after Armstrong created an authentic language for the trumpet, Eldridge developed this language and added to it. But he could do this only by increasing its complexity. He paid for this enrichment by the loss of collective equilibrium; when improvising in a group, Roy continued to play as a soloist. What was natural in the new order killed was had been natural in the old. (Hodeir 1956: 28)

The generational demarcation between „father' and 'son' leads to the mythological premise that in order to progress, the youth must slay the predecessor, feeding along the way on all his qualitative powers. In this way, Hodeir sets the precedent to a recurrent mytheme that is to be often hyperbolized in jazz writing.

The notoriously public altercations between New Orleans revivalists, the swing movement, and later on, the modernists, also politicized jazz in a whole new level. Earlier I noted the quasi-militant tone with which Blesh had counteracted swing. His allegations escalated beyond vaporous remarks against commercialism when, enticing the sensitive post-World War II political climate, he referred to swing followers as a collectivity suffering from "mass autohypnosis" and engaged in "anarchic, orgiastic, and dangerous excitement" (Blesh 1946: 290). In his view, swing was "nihilistic, cynically destructive, reactionary" and aroused "the same blind idolatry the demagogue or the dictator receives from the mob" (Blesh 1946: 290, 291). Only one year prior to the publication of *Shining Trumpets*, Leonard Feather had also rallied one of the stingiest remarks against revivalists under similar pretenses. Against modernists were now barricaded New Orleans and swing defendants alike, and Feather touched home base when conjuring the irony in the coexistence of American racism and messages of tolerance and democracy to appease fascist remains abroad. Feather infamously called

the Moldy Figs the "extreme right-wingers of jazz" (1945: 16). He elaborated by writing that "just as the fascist tend to divide group against group and distinguish between Negroes, Jews, Italians, and „Real Americans,' so do the Moldy Figs try to categorize New Orleans, Chicago, swing music, as „the real jazz'" (1945: 16).

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s a vast body of jazz criticism revolved around the same issues of progress and authenticity under an increasingly politicized discourse. In the midst of the Civil Rights Movement and the genesis of the Black Arts Movement, LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka) shifted the focus onto the category of race, which he ontologically bound to class, with the manifesto-like history *Blues People* (1963). Drawing from a deep knowledge in Marxist social structuralism, Jones re-centered the debate around dominant America's oppression of the racial „other.' Hinting segregation as a dignified solution to white exploitation of African Americans and their material and aesthetic produce, Jones resuscitated issues such as imitation (which had also been the theme for Norman Mailer's 1957 essay, "The White Negro") and racist stereotyping in the journalistic jazz discourse. Presenting the blues idiom as a fundamentally social expression of the collective experience of blacks in America, Jones fired against white musicians' appropriation of the idiom and white writers' notorious insistence on being the voice of authority over the matter. Undoubtedly, his claims were the outcome of a widely-spread resentment that had been building up for generations and for which Jones became an earnest and militant spokesman. *Blues People* was an extension and elaboration of Jones's "Jazz and the White Critic" (1963), in which attacks were directed towards the black middle class, and more emphatically, towards white journalists, for their overlooking of the „attitude' of the black collective consciousness. Jones observed that throughout jazz's short history, from New Orleans up to the avant-garde and free jazz style of Ornette Coleman, John Coltrane, and Sonny Rollins that had followed bop and hard bop, white critics had assailed the music with the erroneous assumption that they could understand the social experience from which the blues idiom derived. Jones's prime objective was the dispelling of Eurocentric aesthetic theories that had harmed the intrinsic value of the music with their paternalistic and hipster-like myths:

> The irony here is that because the majority of jazz critics are white middle-brows, most jazz criticism tends to enforce white middle-brow standards of excellence as some criterion for performance of a music that in its most

> profound manifestations is completely antithetical to such standards – in fact, quite often is in direct reaction against them. (Baraka 1998: 140)[5]

A few years later and partly in response to Jones, Jewish music journalist Nat Hentoff expressed the stigma of being a white writer dealing with black music. Hentoff confesses to years of torment for having felt an outsider and appropriator of an aesthetic that, much as he felt akin to it, would always in some psychosocial level remain out of reach. He recalls the ambivalence with which he strove to resolve his apprehension (an anxiety that he hints bordered on guilt) and his endeavor to rely on the counterargument that all true art, because of its universality, was open and accessible to everyone regardless of race and cultural upbringing. In the end, he opts for the stoic resignation of "listening to jazz . . . and writing less and less about it" (1972: 14). A final bittersweet anecdote that condenses the resurgent complexities inherent to the cultural ownership of jazz closes the article:

> "You see," Duke Ellington said to me a long time ago, "we could have prevented a lot of confusion about this thing called jazz if Fletcher Henderson had listened to me in the 1920s. I told him, „Let's just call it Black music. Then it will be clear where we are and where they are.'" (1972: 14)

The spite against the black music / white critic pairing intensified with the maturation of the Black Arts Movement. In 1970, Martin Williams, a prominent white critic, published *The Jazz Tradition.* The book was a compilation of profiles of leading jazzmen of the past and present; from Jelly Roll Morton, Armstrong and Ellington to Miles Davis, John Coltrane and Ornette Coleman, among others, Williams filtered the heritage of previous jazz scholarship and presented readers with detailed accounts of the stylistic evolution of each musician. His surfacing musicological commentary empirically developed Hodeir's notion of a jazz tradition, resulting in a study where, despite the chapter-long dedication to a select group of genius men (and one woman, Billie Holiday) the aftermath is a sense of a webbing, dynamic flux of influences between themselves and between past, present, and future. An extremely negative review of the book was delivered by Frank Kofsky in an article titled "The Jazz

[5] To avoid confusion, all citations belonging to LeRoi Jones are referenced under the name of Amiri Baraka in the bibliographical section.

Tradition: Black Music and Its White Critics" (1971). Kofsky lashes against Williams's openly anti-Marxist theoretical framework on the grounds that such a stance leads to the racist myth that binds negritude to a natural rhythmic superiority and drive: "Williams in effect backs himself into a corner with only one way out. If jazz does not represent the social creation of black people, then it can only represent – what else? – their „natural rhythm'" (1971: 410), Kofsky writes.[6] He goes on to add that "by excluding the possibility of social interpretations, one has no choice but to account for every aspect of black music in terms of hereditary „rhythmic genius'" (1971: 410). According to Kofsky, Williams's case is just another unfortunate example of the numerous white critics who in spite of (in his view) their insufficient musicological knowledge and their poor background on Marxist theory, are under the illusion that they can create competent jazz critiques. What Kofsky is suggesting is that serious jazz writing should not be catered by a group of white aficionados, whose conclusions are often detrimental to the idiom.

Adjacent to these deeply compromised pieces and works were also numerous publications partly or completely engaged with the musicological aspects of the different jazz schools. Williams had slightly approached the musicological field for his study, as Winthrop Sargeant had done in the 1940s. But the most exhaustively detailed piece from the standpoint of musicological evidence was written by then president of the New England Conservatory of Music, Gunther Schuller. Schuller's *Early Jazz: Its Roots and Musical Development* (1968) bordered on New Criticism in a similar way that *The Jazz Tradition* did. His devotion to the „art for art's sake' approach did not completely annihilate social commentary; however, it did render hints of socio-cultural insight as supportive material to transcripts, annotations and other empirical measurements that fell within the jurisdiction of musicology. With few exceptions, Schuller described previous jazz scholarship as "descriptive or impressionistic" (1968: vii) at its best, blaming foremost the negative effect that value dualisms had had over public perception of the music (especially the high art / popular culture binarism). Thus, Schuller became the true pioneer in reaching beyond the racially-bound historical

[6] Specifically, Kofsky disparages Williams's statement that "Negroes as a race have a rhythmic genius that is not like that of other races . . . his genius has found a unique expression in the United States" (1970: 8), which clearly echoes the primitivism with which black music was irreparably associated throughout the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s.

memory and pushing jazz into the Eurocentric tradition of musicological analysis. His authoritative tone and highly opinionated remarks between what is art and what is not is justified by his access to the material sources themselves. At a time when a thoroughly extensive record collection was a rare property, even for enthusiastic followers, Schuller had the privilege to rely on a substantial discography.

Nonetheless, it is my contention that *Early Jazz* had two weaknesses. The first one portends the same criticism that Kofsky directs against Williams three years later and that had also appeared in 1963 in Jone's "Jazz and the White Critic." Jones had claimed that although musicology is an important step towards a more comprehensive conception of the blues idiom, it is hardly useful if isolated from Marxist dialectic. In his opinion, not only was the type of trend that Schuller would perfect misleading because of its limited vision, but also because it threatened to colonize the very teleological components of the jazz grammar with its Eurocentric systemization:

> The notator of any jazz solo, or blues and blues lyric, has no chance of capturing what, in effect, are the most important elements of the music. A printed musical example of a Louis Armstrong or a Thelonious Monk solo tells almost nothing, except the futility of formal musicology when dealing with jazz. Not only are the various jazz effects almost impossible to notate, but each note also *means something* quite in addition to musical notation. (Baraka 1998: 139).

Indeed, Schuller's preoccupancy with transcriptions and annotations mirrored conventional analysis of classical music. We have to keep in mind that until then jazz music had almost single-handedly been studied from the angle of performances, while scores have always remained the cornerstone of examination for classical music. Schuller's delving into an intersecting methodology that may combine Eurocentric musicological codes and approaches with jazz ultimately set recordings as the primal, vital medium. The intersection, nonetheless, indicated a certain degree of submission on the part of black aesthetics, for it could only be accomplished at the expense of developing an indigenous form of African American musical theory.

Consequential to Schuller's shunning of cultural criticism is also his unique restructuring of the jazz tradition. His in-depth focus on the art of Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington, which he depicts as geniuses in transition between a period of growth, a period of maturity and a period of decadence, represents a point of departure from

Hodeir. Rather than conceiving the jazz tradition as a whole in which styles and ideas are constantly being exchanged and reinvented and in which the simultaneous consideration of numerous blues-idiomatic masters is imperative, the monolithically monographic style of Schuller proposes a canon of „great men.' Armstrong and Ellington, though gifted with a superior receptive sensibility through which they absorb outside influences and styles, are nonetheless mostly portrayed as larger-than-life artists insulated within their own self-stimulating creativity. As we will see, the Great Man Theory has been problematic in the jazz scene for a number of years now, for while some advocates find it indispensable for the consolidation of a canon, others deem it as symptomatic of the susceptibility to myth that jazz never seems to rid itself of.

Schuller's second weakness is his subtle disclosure of the limits to his analysis. After exhaustive annotations on Armstrong's playing in "Big Butter and Egg Man," for instance, Schuller remarks that "of course, there are indescribable elements of Louis's playing," a list in which he includes "the utter purity and sumptuousness of his tone and the easy perfection of his swing, floating effortlessly in time while being nevertheless the acme of rhythmic accuracy" (1968: 105). He would continue to make similar observations in his second book, *The Swing Era* (1989), a fact that would not be lost on Krin Gabbard:

> Because Schuller is also devoted to the myth of jazz's autonomy, he seldom considers the music's contextual and historical relationships. His consistent reluctance in *The Swing Era* to press his analyses beyond his own impressions is most explicit when he states, for example, that Billie Holiday's talent is "in the deepest sense inexplicable" (528), or when he writes of Ben Webster, "as with most truly great art, Webster's cannot be fully explained" (590), or when, after a few words on Lester Young's mastery of understatement, he calls Young "The Gandhi of American jazz" (562).[7] (1995b: 12)

The paradox here is that by indulging on the myth of jazz's autonomy, Schuller borders on the more prominent myth that jazz is elusive, ultimately uncontainable and uncontrollable by human reason. This myth, which recurrently appears in white jazz fiction, should have been vanquished by the systematic objectivity of musicology. In a final twist of irony, and whether because of Schuller's refusal to take into account any

[7] Gabbard's citations are extracted from the following edition: Schuller, Gunther 1989. *The Swing Era: The Development of Jazz, 1930-1945.* New York: Oxford University Press.

form of socio-cultural theory, or because of a naïve tinge in a deconstruction of jazz adoptive of Eurocentric norms, one is left with the impression that no amount of musicological criticism can bring white intellect any closer to viscerally understanding the idiom. In other words, as Schuller delves deeper and deeper into the documents, and deeper and deeper into as scientific an approach as possible, the mythographic effect becomes a mythopoeic one.

The summary above is but a glimpse inside a selected number of studies; other histories and countless journalistic pieces displaying similar or somewhat differing attitudes have been left out for the sake of simplification. The aim of this introduction to histories and journalism has been to familiarize the reader with a handful of key issues around which jazz discussions have revolved for years. As we have seen, some of the main concerns have been the high art / entertainment dichotomy, authenticity, custody, and authority over the music, primitiveness, the struggle between older jazz and new schools, the consolidation of a tradition, and the debate on the most adequate approach for scholarly criticism. I have attempted to convey how all these themes are magnetically attached to the matter of race. Race blooms at the nucleus of all these myths; as a cultural construct it nurtures their persistence whilst remaining open to the possibility of creating new mythemes that may counteract those bound to racist assumptions. For the most part, the representative texts that we have considered lean towards the diffusion and development of myths; they are fundamentally mythopoeic. The Marxist position held by Kofsky and Jones was a counterargument dependent on its own myths. Schuller's final paradox represents the triumph of mythopoeia over what could be viewed as the mythographic qualities of musicology. Musicological preciseness, because of its empirical nature, initially had the potential of deciphering certain shared beliefs about jazz; it was mythographic in the sense that its methodology could separate the actual material evidence from all its racially-based connotations. And yet, Schuller was able to spawn myths pertaining to the Great Man Theory, to the characterization of jazz as elusive; even the idea that music can be so severely divorced from social theory is deemed as mythical by Gabbard. In the following section I discuss the result of this heritage in more recent decades and the effects it had over the role of myth in jazz studies.

1.2. THE EMERGENCE OF NEW JAZZ STUDIES

From the cornucopia of jazz music and writing emerged a new school of criticism that would attempt to redefine the form and content of jazz whilst pushing its way into the academia. Coupled to redirecting jazz studies was the cyclonic reevaluation of institutionalized conventions in the study of classical music and ethnomusicology. Until the early 1980s, „serious' music scholarship (namely of classical music) had been confined to the field of traditional musicology, where paleontology, archival research, history of notation and textual criticism had been of essence.[8] But in the late 1970s a prominent group of university students started questioning the efficiency of such a scope. In 1979, Berkley scholar Joseph Kerman presented the paper "How We Got Into Analysis and How to Get Out" in which he called for a reorientation in musical criticism which would take into account not only the empirical data of formal analysis, but also more interdisciplinary standpoints. In his follow-up book, *Contemplating Music: Challenges to Musicology* (1985), Kerman pointed out the limits to traditional musicology when stating that "musicology is perceived as dealing essentially with the factual, the documentary, the verifiable, the analyzable, the positivistic" (1985: 12). He proposed to distinguish between this formalistic, positivistic branch and criticism, which focused on matters such as aesthetics, values, emotion, and intentionality. Throughout the late 1980s and 1990s, this „new musicology' developed as an integral discipline within colleges and universities. Deconstructionism, semiotics, post-structuralism, Marxism, and cultural studies became some of the fields from which musicologists such as Janet Levy, Susan McClary, Lawrence Kramer, Leo Treitler or Rose Subotnik assessed their critiques.

[8] The indispensability of musicological theory for the development of truly scholarly writing and research can be traced back to Guido Adler's 1885 groundbreaking essay, "The Scope, Method, and Aim of Musicology." According to Richard Parncutt, Adler "was following the example of other, more established disciplines such as law and theology, whose subdisciplines would be neatly divided into historical (*diachron*) and non-historical or systematic (*synchron*) aspects" (2007: 6). The result of Adler's division were the disciplines of historical musicology and systematic musicology, which included musical theory, comparative musicology, and ethnomusicology.

The spirit of new musicology was one of the credentials that boosted jazz studies to evolve as a „serious' discipline worthy of academic interest and to outgrow its own innovative branch, New Jazz Studies, where jazz was not so much analyzed through the music, transcripts, and recordings, but through its metaphorical and multi-signifying meanings in other areas that ranged from literature, history, dance, and film, to politics, photography and sports. With few exceptions, most New Jazz Studies scholars were primarily cultivated in fields such as American Studies, cultural studies, gender studies, African American studies, history, media studies and visual arts. This is not to say that they were the first to vindicate the need for jazz criticism to rely on writers with ample academic background; already in 1958 Martin Williams had stipulated that, following other „serious' art forms, jazz ought to be "trained, explored, disciplined and tested" (1958: 11) and that "part of the critic's initiation should include reading master thinkers and writers from Plato and Aristotle, to T.S. Eliot and Jung" (Leonard 1987: 139). However, they were the first group to truly transcend the divisiveness between the purism of musicology and the social commentary depicted in previous jazz histories and journalism.

Another prime reason standing behind the successful birth of New Jazz Studies was the way that jazz itself had come forth as a preferential symbol not only of African American culture, but of American identity as well. Indeed, the uniquely phenomenal path that jazz and the blues have followed from their birth in terms of popular reception is indicative of the shifting attitudes and the sociopolitical turmoil characteristic of twentieth-century America. Traditional repudiation of jazz was at its peak before World War II. The veil of primitiveness, which led to images of mental and sexual degeneracy and the other racially-based value dualisms that I have sketched in the previous section, was enough to convince respectful members of society that there was no gracious position for the idiom in the molding of American taste.[9] A telling shift of interests

[9] Morroe Berger explained that "leaders and representatives of the white community, especially those who concern themselves with 'public morality' and education" opposed jazz on the grounds of its association with "crime, vice and greater sexual freedom" and also because, rather than showing the black individual in submission, it exalted their "exuberant role" (1947: 461). During the Jazz Age, it was rather common to hear cries railing against the music's abominable manifestation of miscegenation. As one very enraged woman put it in 1924:

came after World War II, when New York inherited from Paris its „cultural capital of the world' status. Sandke points out that this is the crucial period in which jazz becomes "a self-conscious art form" (2010: 108). Although firm institutional support was still to come, jazz's role as an ambassador of democracy in the front had paved the way towards the conception of the music as an expression of American ideals. Lawrence Levine notes that the fact that this music should "become the most widely identifiable and emulated symbol of American culture throughout the world by the mid-twentieth century is one of the more arresting paradoxes of modern American history" (1989: 15).

> One shouldn't forget that [jazz] is also the child of the dregs of the civilized world and that it comes from the lower classes of society. The dances that have penetrated everywhere, in our salons, in our ballrooms, were created in a quarter of San Francisco, the Barbary Coast, where one finds the outcasts of ports, the scum of all the nations and all the races; it would take the alchemy of magicians to turn material from such vile origins into a true masterpiece! (Bauer 2004: 131)

Considering the extremely negative feelings that jazz aroused in the educated white classes and the racial tensions largely incremented by the booming changes brought by the great migration of African Americans to the North, it is no wonder that the public was reluctant to support the music through institutions. In the late 1920s there were those who expressed their doubts as to the potential of jazz as a high art, but they were willing to admit that it deserved some form of aesthetic recognition. In 1927, Adolf Weissman wrote that "the moment has come to treat jazz from the aesthetic point of view," but was quick to add that "this, of course, should not be done by a dull and dry scholar, but by a musical writer closely connected with everyday life, for it is that which breathes in jazz" (2002: 524). One year earlier, another writer had expressed his disagreement with extremism on both sides of the high art / popular culture antinomy. Referring to the former, he claimed that "we have but to turn to the days of the arrival of polka and valse, to show how degenerate and dangerous were felt to be these popular dances of our grandfathers, though one is now instanced as a departed and deplored type of delicacy and grace" (Leigh 2002: 492). "On the other hand," he checked, "it is absurd for jazz enthusiasts to make extravagant claims for its musical importance or its imaginative qualities as popularly purveyed" (Leigh 2002: 492).

Similar, if not more inimical views were held by institutional authorities throughout the 1930s. Segregation policies did nothing to ameliorate the animosity, and neither did the black middle class' disdain of 'embarrassing' aesthetics associated with Southern folklore. If writers such as Panassié or Hobson had made sure to attribute the origin of jazz to black culture, such contemporary disturbances as the Scottsboro trial, the remains of Marcus Garvey's 'back to Africa' movement, or W.D. Fard's founding of the Nation of Islam strengthened the resistance against the acknowledgement of jazz within the academia or national cultural organizations.

As musicians such as Armstrong, Ellington, Benny Goodman and later on Gillespie successfully toured Europe and Asia, a general awareness as to the possibilities of jazz as an emissary of national culture produced a certain pride and satisfaction in America. Adding to this, the rise of bebop in the 1940s also signified the endeavor with which musicians sought to detach themselves from the image of mere entertainers motivated by commercial interests, opting instead to challenge utilitarian artificiality by proclaiming themselves artists.

Today, the bop movement is considered to be the first symptom towards a more emphatic affirmation of jazz as a high art and as an unequivocal aesthetic belonging to African American roots. (More militant positions, as we have seen, would be adopted during the 1960s and 1970s with the Black Arts Movement headed by Amiri Baraka.) But it was in the beginning of the 1980s, following the interracial political turbulence of the previous years, when a more conciliatory view between jazz as an autonomous form of black expression and jazz as a fundamentally American music was reached. This revolutionary stance was not exactly new; as we will see, Ralph Ellison and Albert Murray had for quite some time been insisting on the universal, transcendental appeal of the blues idiom whilst certifying its African American authenticity. But the literary discourse had its limits, and it was up to more powerful and pragmatic forces to relaunch a jazz narrative that would absorb all the complexities of America's struggling century towards an aesthetic identity and at the same time enforce and celebrate black experience. The message was to be delivered in the form of the talented, well-mannered, elegant, and skillfully articulate New Orleans native Wynton Marsalis. After a brief enrollment in Julliard School for the Arts and apprenticing in Art Blakey's band, Marsalis was signed as solo trumpet player to Columbia Records in 1981, catapulting him into an unprecedented level of sponsorship and promotion campaigns in jazz. It is significant that his two debut albums earned him Grammy awards both in the fields of classical music and jazz in 1984. The success brought on additional advertising of the so-called „Young Lions,' a generation of jazz musicians in their twenties emulating Marsalis's dress and speech codes and neoclassicist advocacy. Marsalis's success continued to grow: seven other Grammys would follow, along with the 1997 Pulitzer Prize, honorary doctor degrees from Rutgers University and Amherst, and other substantial recognitions from Ivy League universities. In 1987, Marsalis cofounded a jazz program at the prestigious Lincoln Center in New York. Only nine years later, the

program officially became a full constituent of the Center, with Marsalis as its Artistic Director, a position he still maintains today.

For numerous sound reasons, Marsalis's role as spokesman for jazz has generated vehement criticism from fellow jazz musicians, critics and writers, who react against the monolithic stance promoted and distributed by his persona. Marsalis has been attacked for his demagogic behavior in keeping an anti-white agenda in „Jazz at the Lincoln Center,' and in patronizingly bolstering a conservative history of the music. We will consider these debates in Part 4 of this dissertation, as Marsalis is the leading talking head in Burns's documentary. What is important to keep in mind for now is that Marsalis's reinstating of a jazz tradition based on the reifying of the past and a resistance towards innovation and experimentation in the genre has been crucial for the consolidation of a fully-structured jazz canon.[10] New Jazz Studies hold an ambivalent relationship to this canon: on the one hand, the celebrity and messiah-like status reached by Marsalis and the impact of the „Jazz at the Lincoln Center' empire were helpful for the acknowledgement of jazz as a „serious' art deserving of a more generous place in the academy. Although prior to the Marsalis phenomenon there existed jazz programs at a number of universities, his management of culture-promoting networks should not be underestimated. His prestigious position within the art-oriented media was instrumental for reaching the public and the African American youth and for projecting the ideals of Ralph Ellison, Albert Murray, and Stanley Crouch, thus stretching beyond musicological relevance into the symbolic realm of the blues idiom as the determining factor to the building of „African Americanness.' At least indirectly, the soaring new age of jazz popularity and its subsequent investment in sustaining its high art allure owes a great deal to the business-like abilities of the trumpet player. On the other, in their adoption of post-structuralist and postcolonial disciplines, scholars of New Jazz Studies were quick to deconstruct and dismember the discourse beneath the kind of

[10] At the risk of strengthening another 'great man' story, we must be careful, however, in giving full credit to Marsalis for the establishment of the canon. Undoubtedly, additional institutional support (such as the International Association for Jazz Education, the Institute of Jazz Studies at Rutgers University, or the educational outreach program of the Smithsonian Institution, adding to the tributes paid to jazz in private foundations, museums, and scholarship grants) has been increasingly empowered since the 1980s and has been essential for the establishment of a universal jazz narrative.

canon endorsed by „Jazz at the Lincoln Center' or the Smithsonian Institution on the grounds of exposing the power relationships cementing its foundation.

Indeed, the theme of the canon has been the epicenter to which New Jazz Studies, at least initially, invariably responded. The landmark studies to bring the discussion to the forefront were Scott DeVeaux's "Constructing the Jazz Tradition: Jazz Historiography" and John Gennari's "Jazz Criticism: Its Development and Ideologies," both published in the 1991 issue of *Black American Literature Forum.* The two pieces engaged in the meticulous, quasi-archaeological labor of tracing the connecting thread between jazz's different manifestations throughout the century through a close revision of critics' and audiences' response. They both point to the final, unifying narrative in which all contradictions are apparently resolved: the canonical discourse emergent in the late 1980s and its vociferous acclamation of indebtedness to African American culture. Gennari is more focused on the nascent narrative that agglutinated and naturalized the transition between the antagonistic positions frequently held by jazz critics from the 1930s to the present, while DeVeaux appears to be more preoccupied with the implications of nearing the consolidation of a canon. The two essayists come together in one significant point: the explication of the underlying discursive elements that have enabled the emergence of a self-conscious jazz canon. In describing the work-in-progress of universities and the Lincoln Center, Gennari says that

> Such acceptance of jazz . . . seems predicated on the idea that jazz has transcended its origins in the black community and become universal; that jazz belongs in the academy or in any serious discussion of American art because it has aspired to and achieved a level of excellence comparable to that of the ‚great' works of the European and Anglo-American canon. If jazz has the complexity, intelligence, and timeless significance of true art, the argument goes, it is because it has overcome the aesthetic limitations of its conception in the boozy New Orleans red-light district and its development in the mindless mass-entertainment rituals of the urban dance hall. (1991: 452)

What Gennari is suggesting is not merely that in order to be considered a high art jazz needed to distance itself from its unrighteous beginnings (a setting which, nonetheless, is from this distance invoked in the canon to illustrate jazz's creation myth); more importantly, he is implying that in order to „play the game' of high art, any aesthetic requires the establishment of a coherent, romanticized story to explain its linearity. In

other words, the criteria behind „serious' art heavily relies on a culturally-shared sense of continuity and interconnectedness between the moment of creation, moments of crises, and the perpetual threat of decadence. Construed in such terms, the jazz narrative can be perfected: it is encircling in that it always mirrors past heritage while maintaining an illusion of a reasonable, but never extreme, progression. Herein is where the role in shaping the canon that Marsalis, „Jazz at the Lincoln Center,' and the Smithsonian Institute becomes more evident: their emblematizing of past geniuses close the narrative and point to the neoclassical epoch of jazz. Excesses in experimentalism and fusion cause the music to drift too far away from its roots, breaking the interconnecting thread and cracking the foundations of the canon. Like the Moldy Figs before them, the neoclassicists placed origins above innovation. A similar idea to Gennari's is observed by DeVeaux:

> The essence of jazz . . . lies not in any one style, or any one cultural or historical context, but in that which links all these things together into a seamless continuum. Jazz is what it is because it is a culmination of all that has come before. Without a sense of depth that only a narrative can provide, jazz would be literally rootless, indistinguishable from a variety of other „popular' genres that combine virtuosity and craftsmanship with dance rhythms. Its claim to being not only distinct, but elevated above other indigenous forms („America's classical music'), is in large part dependent on the idea of an evolutionary progression reaching back to the beginning of the century. (1991: 530)

As we have seen in the previous section, the issue of whether jazz was progressing or not was forming itself when the arguments between revivalists and modernists began. The key to the stability of the canon lies in the fact that those episodes are recalled as moments of transition between styles, overlooking the fact that they were more accurately moments where the question of „what is jazz' was more prevalent. The issue of progress was only consequential to the matter of authenticity. As revivalists found first swing and then bop to be antithetical to jazz, their main belief was that jazz was dying or dead; if there was any progression, it was towards what was *not* jazz. But the canon forged the gaps between to weave a narrative in which bop was the natural outcome of swing, and because of its anti-commercialist and self-proclaimed artistic stance, represented a step above previous forms. Rather than a progression towards a dead end, it illustrated an upwards motion pointing towards continuity. DeVeaux

identifies the canon's naturalized transition between styles as a "metaphor of organicism" (1991: 541). He touches upon the restorative powers of myth within the canon when he writes that "the most striking thing about these explanations is the assumption that the impetus for change in jazz is internal. Jazz evolves in certain directions because its inner logic demands it . . . No other explanation is necessary" (1991: 541). It is in this very regeneration and cleansing of narrative imperfections where, as we will see, myth is at play.

Because the notion of a self-conscious jazz canon was only just developing, both writers seem wary of its fragility. Gennari points that in spite of the growing institutional support, "[jazz] continues to struggle for the recognition and the critical understanding that it deserves" (1991: 452). DeVeaux discloses his ambivalent feelings on invoking a new, interdisciplinary method of jazz critique: "it hardly seems fair," he says, "to deconstruct a narrative that has only recently been constructed"; and yet "the time has come for an approach that is less invested in the ideology of jazz and more responsive to issues of historical particularity" (1991: 553).

The multi-angled approach to break down the canon to its skeletal anatomy was to be one of the prime goals of many New Jazz scholars. In 1995, two collections of essays edited by Krin Gabbard were published: *Representing Jazz* and *Jazz Among the Discourses*, initiating the new direction in academic criticism. The object of analysis was no longer the music itself, but the "other history" (Gabbard 1995a: 7) of jazz transmitted through other art forms. While the former collection focused more emphatically on what constitutes jazz literature and jazz visual and plastic arts, the latter investigated the intricacies of jazz history, jazz-based aesthetic theory, and jazz within the politically-inclined discourse. The articles are all case-specific, that is, drawing from a particular story, film clip, painting, or short time period of jazz discographies or journalism, the writers become engaged in the discussion of how jazz can be considered the structuring dynamic behind other art forms and of how jazz may itself be viewed under more humanistic-oriented disciplines. The overarching sense of a dominating canon is the unifying idea behind all the texts. Like Gennari and DeVeaux before him, Gabbard is aware that jazz still finds itself in an early stage of canon formation, one which appears to be solidifying itself with earnest conviction in the last years. The fast development of jazz within a century (let us remember that in a period of less than a hundred years, several schools, including New Orleans, symphonic, swing, bop, cool

jazz, hard bop, free jazz, fusion and avant-garde, etc., have emerged and faded, roughly extending in all their glory over a ten-year lifespan) makes matters all the more complicated. As history has shown, there stands an overwhelming amount of fervent devotees to each style who exalt their own „great men' as the paradigmatic figures of the canon. Until recently, "because of the music's youth," Gabbard writes, "jazz writers have gone about the business of canon-building without having to look over their shoulders at those who would demand alternative canons" (1995b: 13). As I have already suggested above, as the „self-conscious' canon inclusive of all these styles which had previously been deemed antithetical arose in the late 1980s, the contradictions were overlooked. Overall, what Gabbard seeks is not necessarily a toppling of this all-encompassing canon in benefit of establishing a new one, but merely to point out its cracks, to decipher its inherent mythologies through a launching of an unlimited number of „alternative canons.' While the canon is inclusive of most of the jazz schools, from which it selects a limited number of representative „great men,' it is aggressively exclusive when it comes to adopting and accepting the relativism proper to postcolonial disciplines. Studying the symbiotic relationship between jazz criticism, discography, and record promotion in the articulation of the canon, one of the contributors, Jed Rasula, expresses his regret in noticing how despite "having learned from the music *how* to hear the world differently . . . few have been aroused to a corresponding revision of their writing practice, and those purporting to write „history' have never paused to examine the terminological and conceptual presuppositions involved" (1995: 153). By systematically applying case studies as the prevalent methodology of the articles, jazz becomes contextualized and taken to the specific, allowing the articulation of feminist, Afrocentric, deconstructionist perspectives, among others. As one of the essayists puts it, the increasingly authoritative power of the canon in the last years is based on the fact that "current definitions of jazz . . . too often assume that the musicians existed in a historical vacuum" (Kenney 1995: 102). Drawing on Barthes's deciphering of mythologies, the canon can be severed into splinters of accuracy where previously unheard voices are freed from their silence by way of returning history, that is, context, to the mystified aesthetic at hand.

Gabbard's groundbreaking endeavor, however, was not without its critics. At a time when a substantial number of jazz-related professionals were becoming more aware of the distorting abilities of the canon, disagreement was not so much based on

Gabbard's overall aim to provide a platform for the "other history" of jazz as it was on the methodologies used to attempt such an enterprise. Harsh disapproval of Gabbard's choice in contributors was especially given by Mark Tucker in his review of the two works. Educated in the fields of music and musicology, Tucker was sceptical of the reactionary wave against traditional musicology. While he acknowledges the fact that re-contextualizing and re-historicizing jazz is a welcomed project, he finds the cultural studies frame tedious and enervating in its musical short-sightedness: "If all this sounds like the „new musicology' applied to jazz, the remarkable fact is that virtually no musicologists or musically-trained scholars contributed to Gabbard's enterprise" (1998: 132), Tucker says. By excluding and undermining the relevance of the music itself, according to Tucker, writers were prone to make assertions and generalizations often bordering on incorrect, if not misleading, conclusions. Because of the lack of musicianship, many of the essays fell into the exploitation of the same myths that elsewhere they attempted to decipher. Tucker felt this was particularly true of the articles concerning visual and literary arts, where the mystified belief of jazz as a spontaneous, instinctive aesthetic was conceived as the binding element between the music and other aesthetic forms. He further suggests that probably due to the writers' insecurity and ignorance of the actual material, the excesses in quantity and quality of cultural theory leads to a dogmatic tone that not only shrinks from lending musicology some space, but moreover falls prey to the same exclusionary errors of the canon. Such mistakes are particularly evident in the biased way the delicate racial problem is construed:

> At times, authors in *Jazz Among the Discourses* present racial issues in monolithic terms. White musicians are depicted as imitating or appropriating black jazz, vitiating it in the process. . . . Such reductive accounts of race relations in music stem in part from the influence of Amiri Baraka who, it turns out, is one of the earlier jazz writers whose views are embraced heartily by Gabbard's contributors. . . . It is vital to credit African Americans with inventing jazz, defining artistic standards, and ensuring the continued vitality of the music up to the present. Yet it makes little sense to reduce a global musical phenomenon (since the 1920s, really) to a single racialized essence. (M. Tucker 1998: 145)

New musicology and New Jazz Studies, Tucker seems to insinuate, are highly susceptible to the malleability stemming from postcolonial overabundance and

obsession with revisionism. Although the canon should be questioned and placed under the microscope, that is no reason to patronizingly dismiss the legacy of previous scholarship: "Just because earlier jazz writers have gained influence by producing works that have taken on canonical status," he argues, "they are not necessarily part of a conspiracy to disseminate views on jazz that are distorted, elitist, or otherwise untenable for present-day readers" (M. Tucker 1998: 138).

Despite Tucker's views, no doubt shared by many colleagues in the academia, New Jazz Studies continued to grow in subsequent years. In 1998 Columbia University published the collection *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture*. A compilation of past essays and the research of the Jazz Study Group at Columbia, headed by Robert G. O'Meally, *The Jazz Cadence* not only celebrated current trends, but paid tribute to earlier writers who, in spite of using jazz as their subject matter, were generally more associated with the literary fields. The collection itself was conceived as a myriad of apparently opposite voices all enmeshed in the organic construction of the jazz language. O'Meally poetically describes it in the preface as "a jam-session-style mix intended to indicate the range of responses (and counterresponses) to the music and to offer fresh perspectives through unexpected sequencings"; the book offered "a set of preludes or vamps, setting the stage for riffs and solo-work yet to come" (1998: xii). Again, topics ranged from literature, dance, historiography, and painting to feminism, sports, and jazz and emotion. The predominant tone of the book, nonetheless, was different from Gabbard's. Adding to the more discrepant writing by a handful of scholars (Hazel Carby and her feminist call to revaluate the role of blues women in the canon; Scott DeVeaux's "Constructing the Jazz Tradition" and Baraka's "Jazz and the White Critic"), was the more vociferous (if only for the unbalanced quantity of articles) participation of professionals who in some way had contributed to the emergence of the canon. Albert Murray, Stanley Crouch, reprints of Ralph Ellison and Sterling A. Brown, not to mention a Wynton Marsalis interview, mark the overall spirit of the book. Their mythopoeic level of devotion to „great men' and proclamation of the blues idiom as the metaphor of (Afro-) American experience presents a stark contrast to the more critical, mythographic inclination of Carby or DeVeaux. To give the reader a preview of what I mean by the mythopoeic discourse, the following is an excerpt from the Marsalis interview about Duke Ellington:

> **Robert O'Meally**: You said earlier that it's important that he was an *American* composer. In what sense is Ellington, in Albert Murray's phrase, the quintessential American musician?
> **Wynton Marsalis**: Duke Ellington is the quintessential American musician because throughout his development we can see how a progression should go in our country. First, his music is about American themes: it's about people, places, things; it's not about monarchy, it's not about an agricultural environment. It's about cities, technology, telephones, trains, airplanes. Even more, it's about interpersonal relationships, which, except in opera, is something that European music very seldom is about. . . .
>
> Duke Ellington started off saying that he played Negro music, hyphenated American, Afro-American music. We find that as he grew older, he dropped that. So when people would ask him, "Tell us about your people," he'd say, "My people are *the* people." So we see a progression. Somebody who is first dealing with a race conception, which is in the past, tied to tribalism; whether it's a source of pride or whatever else, it's tribalistic conception. To progress further, he says: Look, I'm out here representing people, the human race. This music represents the United States of America, American life. That means that if you are Mexican, it represents you. (Marsalis and O'Meally 1998: 151)

Marsalis's description of Ellington's evolving thoughts is an effort to naturalize the relationship between the particular (Afrocentricism) and the universal (Americanness) in a manner reminiscent of Joyce's Irish characters. Moreover, Marsalis's sketches condense the idea that Ellington transcended the terrestrial by overcoming the "tribalistic" perspective which everyone else seemed to be entranced by. In this way, Marsalis's Ellington is not only a genius with a superior mind (and this without attending to the specifics of his musical skills), but he also transcends the profanely mundane boundaries and contradictions of his time.

However, in all fairness to O'Meally, by including the common view held by Marsalis, Murray, Crouch, and Ellison (even if it has a stronger presence than other contemplations), *The Jazz Cadence* as a whole does indeed mirror the multi-voiced layers of the American texture. In this way so does the collection avoid the anti-canonical fixation with which Tucker had charged Gabbard's books.

The follow-up to *The Jazz Cadence* would be *Uptown Conversation: The New Jazz Studies* (2004), an assemblage of further revision with the self-conscious notion of contributing to a by-then established field of research. The new volume echoed the former with its prime mission to excavate beneath the musicological material, following the premise that "jazz is not only a music to define, it is a *culture*" (O'Meally, Edwards, and Griffin 2004: 2). The editors continue to place cultural historians at the forefront of

more innovative forms of jazz research, especially for the monographic examination of „great men' such as Armstrong, Ellington, Miles Davis, Charles Mingus, and Thelonious Monk in different aesthetic terrains. Considering the imbalance in the previous collection, *Uptown Conversation* displayed a more mature condensation of cultural theories, with particular inclinations towards mythographic scholarly approaches.

The four volumes presented above are prototypical examples of what are now considered to be classics in New Jazz Studies. Since the publication of Gabbard's collections, a considerably vast body of literature undertaking this interdisciplinary approach emerged: Jon Panish's *The Color of Jazz: Race and Representation in Postwar American Culture* (1997), Angela Davis's *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism* (1998), Peter Townsend's *Jazz in American Culture* (2000), Jeffrey Melnick's *A Right to Sing the Blues: African Americans, Jews, and American Popular Song* (1999), Alfred Appel Jr.'s *Jazz Modernism: From Ellington and Armstrong to Matisse and Joyce* (2002), Josh Kun's *Audiotopia: Music, Race, and America* (2005), and the collection *Thriving on a Riff* (2009), edited by Graham Lock and David Murray are just a few of the titles engaged with cultural criticism of jazz. Beyond published books and articles, New Jazz Studies have integrated themselves in university curricula and seminars (such as the Center for Jazz Studies at Columbia and the Master's Program in Jazz History and Research at Rutgers, combining culture and music theory), and conferences (such as the Guelph Jazz Festival and Colloquium and the Leeds International Jazz Conference). Sherrie Tucker (2005), probably the leading scholar in gender studies within the field, has just as much attended to the didactic possibilities of New Jazz Studies, describing her lesson planning and balancing the general responses of students. This dissertation is in great part a product of the work of all these academicians, to which I am greatly indebted. In the next chapter I provide an analysis of five works belonging (or intimately related) to the field of New Jazz Studies which are centered in the study of jazz and myth so as to present the general tendencies in jazz mythography that have been explored in recent years.

1.3. RECENT RESEARCH ON JAZZ AND MYTH

So far, in this presentation of scholarly research on jazz, the term „myth' has been used rather loosely, with the intention of focusing on the sole distinction between mythopoeic and mythographic inclinations on the part of writers and its relationship to the canon, and to exemplify the manner by which a mythographic effort can conduce to a mythopoeic one. To engage oneself in the analysis of the articulation of the canon, as I have so far been implying, is to directly or indirectly adopt a mythographic stance, which has been the prime object of a number of New Jazz scholars. In this chapter, I examine five recent developments in which myth is overtly treated as the subject matter from which to incite the discussion: Neil Leonard's *Jazz: Myth and Religion* (1987), Peter Townsend's *Jazz in American Culture* (2000), Kabir Sehgal's *Jazzocracy: Jazz, Democracy, and the Creation of a New American Mythology* (2008), Randall Sandke's *Where the Dark and the Light Folks Meet* (2010), and Tony Whyton's *Jazz Icons: Heroes, Myths, and the Jazz Tradition* (2010). These pieces are invariably the results of the growing awareness of the canon and mirror the concern that New Jazz Studies showed towards deconstructing the multi-layered discourse of the received jazz narrative. And yet, however centralizing the theme of myth may be, in each of these works myth is used and understood in different terms, hence evidencing the complexities inherent to the disparate meanings and purposes that the term may serve. All the works focus primarily on the music itself, and how myth operates within the culturally-shared notion of what jazz is and what the jazz narrative entails. Literary sources, for the most part, remain secondary bodies of information and are thus not handled as leading mythopoeic vessels in themselves.

Neil Leonard's *Jazz: Myth and Religion* (1987) stands as the pioneering work to consider the music's mythical qualities. Following Victor Turner's and Max Weber's theories on the social conditions that render the rise of sectarian and religious movements viable, Leonard traces the sociological phenomena surrounding the jazz sphere and its spiral-like evolution from individuality to plurality. It is jazz's fascinating qualities as a socializing force which obliges Leonard to apply a near-anthropological, near-archaeological prism where every sub-societal group is classified in accordance to their relationship to the music (whether they are venerators or disparagers, enthusiasts or censors) and to the type of dedication they may display. Within this transparent

taxonomy of jazz-related „specimens,' power relations become all the more evident, and the argument explicating the transitions from „communitas' to „religion' is neatly justified. The resulting image is a sociological anatomy of direct and indirect participants in the evolution of jazz towards religiousness, a closed system of interrelating forces intended to sustain the music as the sacred object of devotion that, however, is always susceptible to decay stemming from allegations of heresy or the more powerful surge of new jazz communitas fostering a more authentic, „truer' message. The societal spirals within the cycles towards jazz musical renovation represent diffident attitudes against the American establishment and against African American Methodism. Construed as a phenomenon intrinsically bound to liminality (a notion Leonard borrows from Turner), jazz communitas are constructed on the fringing edges and cracks of the accepted social norm, where a sense of fraternity, or brotherhood, is shared by the individuals in an increasingly manifested and accepted notion of membership. This fellowship is at origin an open, non-institutionalized relational structure, where integration of members is loosely based on the common appreciation of the music at a spiritual level and on the adulation of the prophetic figure who brought the message about. But as the relational bonds are progressively hardened by dogmatic codes of conduct and principles of liminality, the communitas moves towards the sectarian stage, and then towards institutionalization in a church-like manner. This magnetic evolvement from the marginal towards the center is periodically repeated by new jazz movements spawning in moments of crises which Leonard, following Weber, calls „breakthroughs,' and which are characterized by the appearance of a „great man.' From its single-celled prophetic representation, the new jazz message again attracts liminoids into an embryonic cult where egalitarianism with vague hints of discipline is prevalent. In its consolidation as a sect, the cult often assimilates similarly-oriented brotherhoods, and it is in this stage where power relations and distribution of dedicated roles becomes paramount, consolidating behavioral and disciplinary codes among the members. Leonard summarizes the jazz-morphic crisis towards the sectatian stage as follows:

> If it survives long enough, the jazz cult, like its religious counterparts, tends to merge with similar groups, becoming part of a more formal, increasingly structured body, a sect. Admirers of say, Bix Beiderbecke extend their fascination to Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington, or the other way

> around. And, as the movement grows, its membership expands and differentiates. Elitists find discerning newcomers in their midst, gifted young musicians critics whose hearts are in the music first and last. Newcomers also include less committed enthusiasts, fellow travelers, including musicians, writers, record collectors, hipsters, and others absorbed in the music but maintaining important links to the outside world. From these ranks come believers, some accredited by the establishment, who perform priest-like functions, rationalizing and certifying sectarian rituals and myths in broadly accepted ways: critics, who explain and evaluate new sounds; historians, who put the plots, characters, and settings of the music's past into meaningful order and perspective; curators, including collectors and discographers, who preserve sacred objects and verify the details of the emerging canon. (1987: 31)

It is in this rationalization to establish the credentials of myths and rituals where the key to social transition is exposed. In its initial stage, the cult preaches common veneration of the music, but in its premature development to becoming a sect, individual indulgences are slowly eliminated, for the message of the music becomes encoded in a series of societal norms that differentiate between fully devoted members, those who are being initiated, and those who, from their position from within and without, articulate the message for outsiders to understand. Inevitable ideological friction follows: in their endeavor to justify the music's credentials, priests and followers push the boundaries into laxer terrains that may become acceptable, and even embraced, by the mainstream. The firmness that had regulated the sect is no longer liminal, and purists within the movement either abide to tolerance or abandon the sect for its lack of novelty, seeking new prophets with a distinguishing vision. Socially, the sect is on its way to becoming a church-like entity, and its empowerment belies the previous radicalism that had enabled its birth in the first place. The jazz church does not answer to any one particular school; although unequal exaltation of movements and prophets is condensed within the jazz canonic narrative, it is an institutionalized body that projects and celebrates a structure based on inclusion and coexistence of styles. If Leonard had identified three main jazz sects (ragtime and New Orleans jazz of the 1910s and 1920s, late 1940s and early 1950s bop, and the free jazz of the 1960s and 1970s), what remains now is a churchly discourse based on integration and amalgamation, where oppositions are not so vehemently practiced, but instead acquire a crucial position inside the narrative of a mythical past to explain moments of crises and geneses of styles. A fluid, uniform exegesis of this narrative is publicized, one that may minimize sentiments of

estrangement or feelings of withdrawal on the part of jazz-related participants as much as on the part of outsiders, who are now conceived as potential members.

Leonard's understandings of myth and ritual are centered on an anthropological and sociological structuring of the jazz sphere. In this way, rituals are conceived as practices aiming towards membership in the sect; by respecting and improving one's skills in these behavioral sets, the individual is bound to gain his own space within the group. By its very nature, rituals are not only a window to the other-worldly experience of transcendence, but they are also the defining moments where the initiated are exposed as either true followers, bland imitators, or squares unqualified and undeserving of egalitarianism within the circle. The very act of improvising in a solo, traditionally identified in jazz as the moment where uniqueness and distinction of sound is placed under judgment, is conventionalized through the ritualistic premise of aesthetic expression of individuality and singularity whilst paying tribute to the common set of beliefs holding the sect together. Other rituals involve dress and speech codes, understanding and practice of a shared type of sense of humor, and the initiation of novices through educational steps that although distinct from mainstream practices in their visible content, allude to the same referential patterns of universal mythology: symbolic death and rebirth through cutting contests, temporal separation from the fraternity for soul-searching in the form of woodshedding, and apprenticeship from elder masters of the idiom all contribute to the musician's true understanding of the magic of music, a magic which is to flow through the musician's body and instrument the moment the dominion of the idiom is perfected, elevating him away from the mundane and into a platonic dissociation of sensibility.

According to Leonard, myths are either explanatory concoctions of these rituals or stories that are enacted in their practice. Either way, they serve to rationalize the rituals to some extent, justifying their continuation and the principles under which they must be carried out. If the sect was grounded on the message articulated by a certain prophet or shaman, then it follows that mythical stories on a limited number of ‚great men' should constitute the selective collective memory of the group – Leonard sets the example of the legends surrounding Joe Oliver and Charlie Parker. The lives of these prophets are dramatized through oral narrations, anecdotes and hearsay, to which additional images and colorful descriptions in literature, film, and graphic art contribute. The result is a formulaic equivalence between the prophet's musical genius, his

behavior (always presented as liminal in one way or another) and personal traits. Similarly, Leonard puts his finger in the identification of spaces that are glorified by members of the sect: New Orleans, Kansas City and New York have become the cardinal points of jazz narratives and are maintained as such by the church-like structure. These cities and their clubs were "states of mind where the extraordinary happened, where the supernatural seemed natural" (Leonard 1987: 130). Although myth was intended to somewhat rationalize the ritual, the stories which it developed were woven not around fact, but around hyperbolic symbolism and tall-tale discourse rooted on belief.

Peter Townsend offers a different application of myth in the final chapter of his book, *Jazz in American Culture* (2000). Drawing on Roland Barthes's semiologic depiction of myth as a metadiscourse invested in bourgeois ideology, Townsend appeals to the tendency of jazz to be de-historicized, de-contextualized, and naturalized as a cultural commodity. Although Townsend's use of Barthean theory is somewhat vague and unspecific as to its methodology (he concludes that jazz is reduced to essences and is appropriated by culture without attending to either the reasons behind its mystification nor to the consequences it has over right and left-winged politics, which are key concerns of the French theorist), he touches on two important issues behind the theory of myth as a second-order language.

The first issue revolves around a collection of what he refers to as "micro-myths" or sub-myths composing the wider, mystified essence of jazz. These micro-myths resemble W.W. Douglas's (1953) modern definition of myth as illusion, as distorted convention and propaganda dogmatized under shared belief, in that they represent a pattern of misleading (and often completely erroneous) preconceptions of jazz. Such a definition is close to Barthean mystification, for it is in the process of naturalization where falsity germinates, developing a commodity out of the mystified object. However, we must be careful in distinguishing between Douglas and Barthes in that where the former speaks of a falsified essence (to put it bluntly, a lie), the latter claims that "myth hides nothing and flaunts nothing: it distorts; myth is neither a lie nor a confession: it is an inflexion" (Barthes 1972: 129). The distinction should not be undermined, for it is highly problematic. If a certain assumption is a lie, then we must accept its enunciation as opposing to factual truth. On the other hand, if a certain assumption is a distortion, we accept that there is an underlying truth that, however

minimal, must be regarded as the unquestionable source. I will attend to Barthean mystification later on, but for now it is important to point out that, at least within the jazz discourse, the differentiation between the two forms can be tricky, and frequently scholars and spokesmen of the idiom apply „myth as lie' and „myth as distortion' interchangeably, without considering the consequences of such a tautology. Townsend's case is one where, despite of his affiliation to Barthes, the author seems to suggest that the micro-myths are based on error. Either way and in all fairness to Townsend's remarkable summarization of questionable assertions, these micro-myths provide a condensed insight into systemized, common-held beliefs about jazz that are reproduced in literature and the visual arts. The list is as follows:

1. Jazz has the quality of being indefinable. It has an essence, but it is mysterious and elusive. Not everyone „gets it'. If you have to ask what it is, you don't get it . . .
2. Jazz cannot be learned or taught. The ability top lay it is given to a select few, who simply produce it naturally. Jazz is both difficult and easy: difficult to understand, it is easy to play for those who are predisposed to it.
3. Many African Americans can play jazz well, and all can understand it, by instinct, as can all black people of whatever national origin.
4. Most white Americans can neither play jazz well nor understand it. Certain white hipster geniuses, however, relate to jazz readily, though their apprehension of it is more intellectual than instinctual.
5. Jazz originates in certain bordellos in New Orleans. This kind of place is still its natural home.
6. The lives of jazz musicians are tragic. Jazz musicians frequently suffer from drug addiction, and die young.
7. Women in general do not participate in jazz, except as singers. The abilities of female singers are improved by unhappy and abusive love lives.
8. Jazz musicians share none of the tastes or attitudes of the American public, whom they despise. They are contemptuous of popular music, but are often obliged to play it. (Townsend 2000: 162)

These statements are just some examples of jazz and jazz history mythology (in the sense of distorted or false, yet shared, fragments of information that are accepted as truth). Other claims attuned to commodity are, for example, that jazz is the only truly American art form, that it is unique in the world in its emphasis on improvisation, that hard bop was a reaction against cool jazz, that the music started as a freely improvised amateur folk expression and gradually became more fixed, professional, and artistic as

musicians became technically better and learned how to read scores, etc. Undoubtedly, some ounce of truth rests beneath some of these impressions (for example, it is true that substance abuse became problematic amongst beboppers suffering addictions); while other assertions of alleged mystification would still today be refuted by historians and scholars, such as Townsend's confidence in New Orleans not being the nucleus of the incipient jazz idiom. Indeed, the balancing out between fact and fiction in these micro-myths most often becomes an arduous task: each must be scrutinized individually, compared and contrasted with the information provided by a series of early sources that, as we have seen, although aiming for scholarship, were mostly the product of white enthusiasts and freelance writers. In any case, these deformed (or false) generalizations leading to assumptions (namely on racial matters) have indeed made their way into other art forms (Townsend particularly attends to jazz photography) and have aided the almost customary use on the part of jazz writers and scholars to apply the term „myth' to refer inextricably to distortion and to lie.

Townsend's second observation regarding jazz and myth is his identification of some of the basic binarisms in the music's culturally received value system. "Within the wider society," he writes, "jazz has been expressed through cultural genres, categories of meaning and value whose origins lie outside of jazz culture and which predate and subsume it" (2000: 167). These categories are based on mutually-exclusive dichotomies such as art / commerce, black / white, written / improvised, affect / technique, etc. Although Townsend is unclear as to the relation between these dualisms and Barthes, his understanding of the reductionism to which jazz is subjected to through these categories is an essential insight for further study of the representation of the music within the codifying semiotic system of other aesthetics.

Both the notion of myth as distortion or falsehood and the manipulative forces pertaining to binary hierarchies have been explored in the recent seminal works of Randall Sandke and Tony Whyton. Sandke's *Where the Dark and the Light Folks Meet: Race and the Mythology, Politics, and the Business of Jazz* (2010) presents a much welcomed revision of the black / white dualism and the implications of having established subsequent distortions or falsities. The author, a white musician, bravely confronts the sensitive subject of race within the jazz sphere in an unprecedented manner that defies the taboos installed by the politically-correct color-blind ethics which were successfully spread through white middle-class America in the 1990s. His

willingness to face the elephant in the room is illustrated by an interesting anecdote in the introduction in which he recalls a friend in the academia asking him "why on earth I wanted to kick this „homet's nest' around," to which he replies "I don't, but I feel someone has to. I would prefer it not be me, but having accepted the challenge I also accept the inevitable consequences" (Sandke 2010: 11). The study is mostly a quest for historical accuracy to refute, or at least challenge, some of the prevailing notions about race that have been traditionally adopted by professional musicians and critics and to which jazz itself has molded its meaning. Contrary to the usual apologetic standpoint embraced by contemporary white writers when dealing with race (a position which unequivocally seems to shepherd its way back to similar stereotyping assumptions), Sandke penetrates within the mythologies to salvage empiric evidence to contradict or question allegations that have deeply infected the core of jazz creeds. The innovation in his approach is that his revelations are not limited to the subversion of black profiling for more positive images, but more importantly, to that of white stereotyping as appropriators and imitators. "The overwhelming racialization of jazz has not only denied outside musical influences, stifled creativity, and pitted group against group," Sandke writes, "it has also overlooked the crucial role that white audiences and presenters have played in disseminating and promoting the music. Business interests have indeed frequently exploited black musicians, but they have helped enrich many as well" (2010: 8).

In this line, Sandke's quest addresses issues such as the idea that jazz is insulated within the African American community (he accepts its cultural origins, but brings evidence to support the crucially deterministic influence of Eurocentric musical forms in the development of the aesthetic); the belief that white impresarios were solely motivated by capitalist exploitation of black musicians (he sheds light into the positive contribution of philanthropist John Hammond in launching countless artists, including Billie Holiday, the partnership between Duke Ellington and Irving Mills, from which the former substantially benefited, or the Melrose brothers' interracial recording of Jelly Roll Morton and the New Orleans Rhythm Kings, among other collaborations); the assumption that black musicians were always mistreated and paid significantly less than their white counterparts (Sandke exposes the actual numbers and rates to show that such an abuse was not necessarily the standard of studios); the interest that more than several black middle-class groups had in keeping the image of jazz as a vulgar form of

entertainment, a fact often undermined when contrasted to the impact of white criteria; the important role of white audiences in elevating jazz to the category of high art, which has traditionally been acknowledged of European, but not American crowds; or the actual musical merits that Wynton Marsalis can be accounted for (he discloses the colossal marketing and promotion masking the considerable, but not grandiose talent of the trumpeter).

These are not mythologies that can be as easily dismissed on the grounds of racism as the belief that all blacks have an instinctual predisposition towards jazz. The reason is that while this latter example can be discarded for the obviousness of its generalization, perceived as a lie, Sandke's concerns stand within a terrain of dubious flexibility where measurements of truth are susceptible to subjective obscurities. While fact is irrefutable, truth is, by its very nature, an unstable, relative force. The result is that while some of his conclusions are keenly effective in the quelling of certain myths, others simply lead into further arguments and discussions without a final resolution to the conflicting truths. Both possibilities are great accomplishments (it would be naïve to believe that all of these myths will ever be fully deciphered) and have provided a new platform to renegotiate the history of jazz. Thus, Sandke's selected corpus of myths is also more complex in that it appeals to specifics which not only require careful scouting of never-retrieved documents, and in that it threatens to disturb the balance reached between African American trauma and white compensation through collective guilt. Though not explicitly referring to Barthes, Sandke applies his methodology in the deciphering of myths by reattaching jazz to its contextual history. By focusing on the metalanguage itself, that is, by focusing on the language not pertaining to jazz's semiotic system, but to the discourse revolving around representations of jazz, and exposing its culturally-based intentionality (the taboos that have impregnated racial discussion) through historical accuracy, Sandke ultimately addresses the power relations elaborately intertwined within these myths: the issue of racial ownership, legitimacy, and authority over the music.

Tony Whyton's *Jazz Icons: Heroes, Myths, and the Jazz Tradition* (2010) is also a groundbreaking work in its own way. Whyton recuperates the same romanticizing designs that Townsend spells out in his list of micro-myths to explore not so much the historical and historiographic values of truth and fact, like Sandke does, but to engage the reader into a series of arguments about the process of deformation itself. Again, the

distinction between Barthean myth and myth as lie is overlooked; but this does not matter, considering the fact that Whyton refuses to reduce myth to a semiotic system. Instead, he alludes in his introduction to other possibilities from which to analyze the jazz icon that are not limited to Barthes's signifier / signified correlation; thus, aside from „icon as sign,' he refers to „icon as visual image'" „icon as symbol,' „icon as uncritical object of devotion,' and „icon as deity.' These approaches, mostly adhering to a cultural studies perspective, are distributed throughout carefully sequenced chapter-long case studies. At the axis of these practical models lies the iconic figure; as Whyton digs deeper into the intricacies of the Great Man Theory, he uncovers the articulating segments that so prodigiously construe a shared representation of jazz to project to the public. In spite of the fact that many of the romanticizing inclinations (including some of Townsend's micro-myths) regarding the jazz genius are, as I have stated before, deciphered on the grounds of their obvious falsehood, often times the stereotype has been maintained as a business commodity. The impulsive, instinctive, antisocial, profoundly heterosexually masculine, other-worldly, tormented, mysterious, conniving nature that is usually attributed to jazz musicians through myth (whether we understand this as a discursive device or as a cultural tendency for the collection of a determined set of stories and beliefs) hence reveals its strong presence through several mediums. Whyton's case studies range from an overview of narrative contexts in African American mythology, and performance habits and recurrent behavioral patterns onstage (through the disembodied sound of John Coltrane), to musical revisionism of jazz classics (through Kenny G.'s extremely controversial 2000 recording of Armstrong's "What a Wonderful World"), and marketing strategies related to iconic figures (through a depiction of the commodities publicized in Impulse!, a highly-profiled jazz record label). Subsequent chapters include a landmark analysis on the mystifying potential of anecdotes enhancing the image of certain musicians within the wider jazz narrative; a brief, but telling examination of the Great Man Theory within biographical narratives (through the representation of Duke Ellington in the writing of David Hadju and in Burns's documentary); and even an updated exploration of how „great man' myths function within the fields of education and New Jazz Studies.

References to a single theory from which to work with myth are absent. Whyton's awareness of a latent ideology of power relations concealed beneath the mediums is always present, and in this sense his study could be considered a legacy to

Barthes. But since, as I mentioned, the author does not set out to be a ‚reader of myths' in the Barthean sense (that is, to return history to the mystified object), but to focus exclusively on the manifestations of ‚great men,' and therefore, to consider the Great Man Theory as a mystifying methodology in itself, the overall book must be regarded as a collection in which myth takes on the form not only of metalanguage, but also on the more traditional meaning of mythology as a body of stories shared by a culture. The ability with which he connects the ‚great man' technique through these different mediums is convincing enough and reaches its prime objective: to encourage readers to question a canon that is continually being reproduced by filmmakers, writers, record companies, and even educational institutions. This canon, he suggests, relies heavily on intentionally crafted assemblages of ‚great men': he argues that "canonic works transcend the social world and promote the idea of great art as being universal," and that "iconic artists support this ideology by being portrayed as the Outsider, either as a special being, a misunderstood figure, a social recluse or self-reflective genius" (Whyton 2010: 24). Though not explicitly, the author seems to imply that it is an inversion (or reversion) of values within the binary systems concerning jazz geniuses which has made contemporary culture condone and encourage these types of images through a canon that knows no boundaries in terms of mediums of expression. Where antisocial and instinctual behavior could once be associated to primitivism, the late twentieth-century mainstream accepted it as a decisive sign of artistry and refinement, projecting this image through as many vessels as possible.

So far we have considered works which contrast early jazz writing by critics and journalists through their mythographic approach. Leonard, Townsend, Sandke, and Whyton take a critical approach in becoming decipherers of myth, or at least observers of its structure and dynamics inside society. But mythography is not necessarily the direction that current scholars always take. Kabir Sehgal's *Jazzocracy: Jazz, Democracy, and the Creation of a New American Mythology* (2008) is a clear demonstration of enduring efforts to re-mythologize jazz, that is, to openly brace a mythopoeic discourse. *Jazzocracy* employs a persuasive tone to expand the jazz-as-democracy metaphor that permeated the works of Ralph Ellison, Albert Murray, Stanley Crouch, and Wynton Marsalis. Despite the fact that the craft of these writers and this highly relevant musician already constitute the soulful essence of the canon, Sehgal's vision is one in which the same democratic spirit endorsed by them is groundlessly

sought in other forms of American music. In his belief, modern music, namely rap and pop, has been severed from the civilly and politically-compromised spirit of American mythology, consequently tainting the purity of the nation's message of freedom and equality:

> What does popular music say of America today? Popular rap music often rewards the most brutal and demoralizing voice. To enact a vulgar stereotype speaks not to the beauty of America. Much of popular rap music shows what we don't want to become, instead of presenting a model to which we aspire. (Sehgal 2008: xxiv)

The author goes on to add that:

> Instead of speaking to the trusted and true core beliefs of America – like self-reliance and the melting pot of diversity – many of today's popular mythmakers speak of vapidity, violence, and vulgarity. Many modern mythmakers rap of the angry black man and the rebel without a cause. These musicians have divorced myth from music. (Sehgal 2008: xxvi)

Sehgal's anti-contemporary pop music campaign in exaltation of past forms of jazz borders on political propaganda. These symptoms can be explained by his professional background, for not only did Sehgal tour with Wynton Marsalis in 2004 with his bass, but that same year he also worked as special assistant for Senator Max Cleland during the John Kerry presidential campaign, and was part of the advising committee for the Youth Vote. Deeply enmeshed within political sciences, Sehgal glibly rants about the lack of positive American values in today's music, indicating that such a morality has unfortunately been confined to the past, specifically to the jazz idiom. It is significant that he uses the category „jazz' in what he calls "a liberal way, referring to the entire genre that encompasses early New Orleans style, big band (swing), and bebop," hence overlooking "the confusing jazz wars" of "what is or what isn't jazz music" (Sehgal 2008: xxviii). First of all, Sehgal faithfully follows Marsalis's selective account of jazz history. Notwithstanding that more than fifty years stand between bebop and the publication of *Jazzocracy*, and with the exception of a few names of notable post-bop musicians mentioned, Sehgal's implicit dismissal of subsequent schools from the jazz category resemble the educational biases carried out at „Jazz at the Lincoln Center.' Secondly, mirroring the canonic structure, Sehgal naturalizes the historic confrontations between schools and styles. As I mentioned earlier, such battling positions are

articulated in the canon as critical turning points inflecting the direction of the music, but these moments are perceived within a single evolutionary line, that is, they represent stages of metamorphosis leading to new developments, but never actually threatening the overall perdurability of the music. Jazz, conceived as a uniform, homogeneous entity in the way that Sehgal conveys, becomes a much more powerful force against the displaced anarchy of contemporary music.

The consonance with which jazz is deliberately described in these terms enables the placing of associations between the music and symbols of American virtue on the basis of equivalence. The first chapter, titled "Yankee Doodlin'," stresses the narrative possibilities of the jazz idiom (Sehgal contends that a solo performance is an act of telling a story) and its self-consciousness of its form and development. In other words, jazz signifies not only the content of a certain mythology, but more importantly, it consistently refers to the act of „making' a story, that is, it is process-oriented. Sehgal parrots John Kouwenhoven's 1954 essay "What's „American' About America," where jazz was again used "in its broadest significant application" (Kouwenhoven 1998: 127) and was related to other purely American symbols, such as the Constitution, the Manhattan skyline, the writing of Mark Twain and Walt Whitman, and even the chewing gum, in that these elements show "a concern with the process rather than product . . . a concern with the manner of handling experience or materials rather than with the experience or materials themselves" (Kouwenhoven 1998: 133).[11] The

[11] Kouwenhoven's descriptive essay on the most purely recognizable features of America weaves the common aspects between jazz and other national symbols on the basis of their structuring principles and their purpose. In the same sense that the chewing gum, an American invention, carries fundamental appeal in "the process of chewing it" (Kouwenhoven 1998: 135) or that Emerson and Whitman insisted upon the perpetual transit inherent to nature, so does jazz emphasize the art of driving forward through rhythm. It is not only the visualizing of motion, but the type of motion itself which Kouwenhoven identifies as essentially American:

> Like the skyscraper, the total jazz performance does not build to an organically required climax; it can simply cease. The 'piece' which the musicians are playing may, and often does, have a rudimentary Aristotelian pattern of beginning, middle, and end, but the jazz performance need not. In traditional Western European music, themes are developed. In jazz they are toyed with and dismantled. There is no inherent reason why the jazz performance should not continue for another 12 or 16 or 24 or 32 measures (for these are the rhythmic cages in jazz corresponding to the cages of a steel skeleton in architecture). As in the skyscraper, the aesthetic effect is one in motion, in this case horizontal rather than vertical. (1998: 129)

insistence on jazz as an organic entity draws on the rejuvenating qualities of the democratic system as a form in constant renewal, open to the demands of new generations where freedom and liberty of speech are, according to Sehgal, wheels motioning the process. The jazz-as-democracy metaphor deeply opposes other forms of government where process is not the operative principle, leading to staleness and decay at their inability to embrace the possibility of change. The notion of process supplies Sehgal with further associations based on equivalence in which jazz is conceived as an aesthetic breathing on the principles of the Constitution. The very act of a jam session, and even competitive cutting contests, provide a rich metaphor of the rules binding the individual and law together. "In America's democracy, man may not respect anyone else," he writes, "but he respects the law because he is implicitly part author, a stakeholder in the contract of democracy. This respect gives the making of democracy a legal and moral force" (Sehgal 2008: 13-14). Similarly, "no matter how virtuosic your lead alto saxophonist may be, he or she needs the support of the center. . . . The politics of liberty, the „one man, one vote' principle, can be found in most jazz combos, but the power of the center must prevail" (Sehgal 2008: 6). The binarism individual / society is pushed to the forefront and resolved in the same way that American mythology construed its frontiersman: the anti-Eurocentric stance where man can be self-made by his own accord and in the process afford new possibilities for the center, that is, for America at large, stands as a social agreement to the maxim of democratic possibility.

To support his vision, Sehgal's second chapter is a tribute to the jazz that spread the democratic message in Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union, and France. Conceived as a weapon in its own right, jazz was an unstoppable ambassador. Sehgal portrays France as a passionate recipient of jazz that in the 1930s went as far as indulging in allegations of ownership of the music, failing to notice the negative effects that the jazz phenomenon had over native musicians' economy, as explored by Jeffery H. Jackson (2002). As to Nazi Germany and the USSR, Sehgal sees Stalin's and Goebble's efforts to first

---

Sehgal borrows this notion from Kouwenhoven to procure an image of jazz based on organic interactions between individuals and society, between past and present, and between those essences perceived through the senses and the platonic ideal of democracy. Incidentally, Kouwenhoven's essay was reprinted in *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture* under the heading of a part titled "One Nation Under a Groove, or, the United States of Jazzocracy," from which Sehgal most likely borrowed the name for his book.

demolish and censor jazz and then to adapt it to indigenous characteristics of their native music as an irrefutable sign of the triumph of democracy over suppressive, violent, dictatorships. Indeed, jazz's proliferation within the culture of nations antithetical to America is a fascinating point in history, but to convey the impression that the majorities under the ruling of Hitler or Stalin were jazz enthusiasts scheming ways to listen to the music without being reprimanded and, more importantly, to suggest that such a behavior signifies the people's visceral desire for a democracy, is a mythopoeic simplification overestimating the inspiring qualities of jazz, however marvelous they may be. Michael H. Kater (1989) and Jennifer Fay (2004) have offered more critical perspectives on the complexities of jazz in Germany during the Third Reich in ways that avoid mythopoeic pretensions.

In his third and final chapter, Sehgal evokes the potential of the jazz-as-democracy metaphor through an understanding of myth as a collection of stories, archetypes and motifs that, following Emile Durkheim, nourish a sense of shared identity among the members of a society. Semantically speaking, the jazz-as-democracy metaphor offers space to integrate "myths of redemption and suffering," "myths of kinship," "myths of valor," "myths of unjust treatment," and "myths of trickster" (Sehgal 2008). Sadly, Sehgal's objectives do not keep all their promises, and while it would have been genuinely innovative to examine the ways in which these myths can be exactly codified within jazz's musical patterns, the excess of poetic license revolves around an uneventful argument that echoes the same mythopoeic tendencies applied in the previous chapters. On the other hand, such an approach would have required a mythographic position that would implicitly expose the same discursive manipulation that Sehgal has thus far been using. It is precisely his refusal to acknowledge the manipulative powers of myth (especially those that answer to a politicized agenda) which is troubling. The ease with which he resolves some quintessentially American binarisms (such as the democratic depiction of the self-made man and collective society) and his increasing of the heavy load of value in others (such as the equivalence jazz-democracy / rap-anarchy) are a brave patriotic effort, but severely outdated. If a text is to be an effective mythopoeic treatise, intentionality must be concealed within its texture. Continual clarification of his objectives and his unbending outlook on critical matters that could lead to fruitful thinking are consistent, at the expense of a more disguised, poetic approach that would have camouflaged the mystifying method,

rendering it more obscurely, and therefore being more effective. By repeatedly targeting rap and other forms of today's pop music on the basis of their celebration of violence and nihilism, not only is he denying the possibility for their own mythologies to voice themselves, but he tears the musical continuum that many a scholar has traced between jazz and modern forms of musical expression. His monolithic and intransigent position leaves no other room than to either follow his mythology religiously or violently react against it – probably many readers will even come to sense that if they do not support the jazz-as-democracy metaphor, they are espousing anti-patriotic emotions.

Jazzocracy is an exception, however. For the most part, mythopoeia complying with the jazz canon today is relegated to less linguistic mediums, such as photography, film, dance and record marketing strategies, or to more gifted writers who are more skilled in the art of rhetoric. Both possibilities possess the ability of not flaunting intentionality, masking their propagandistic appearance and therefore providing more convincing conclusions. Generally, scholars investigating myth and jazz take, as we have seen in the previous cases, a mythographic approach, launching new ideas for readers to discuss and research, rather than conceiving the reader as a mere recipient of mythology and a potential vessel for its transmission.

These books have been selected to familiarize the reader with the general direction that myth follows within New Jazz Studies and to introduce some of the ways in which myth can be understood and applied. From Leonard's sociological usage of myth, to Townsend's and Sandke's more or less explicit exploitation of Barthes's mystification, and from Whyton's deconstructionism of the canon through an analysis of the Great Man Theory to Sehgal's strive to expand the canon's horizons, myth offers countless interpretations. To consider them all within the jazz discourse would require several volumes, and neither is it the object of this dissertation. The following item is an exposition of the theoretical frameworks that will be used throughout the rest of this study. I attempt to present the methodology and justify its application and applicability within the study of jazz narratives, as well as to establish the differences with previous perspectives on the topic of myth and jazz.

1.4. FINAL NOTES ON JAZZ MYTHOGRAPHY

Having considered the history of jazz criticism and the more recent mythographic and mythopoeic directions it has taken, I now propose new methodological angles from which to deconstruct the discursive tendencies of mythical paradigms.

I must clarify that in spite of the fact that Barthean mystification and Signifyin(g) Theory have, as I have indicated above, been used by previous scholars, I provide an alternative perspective from which to regard such critical frameworks. In terms of Barthes, contrary to what Townsend and Whyton have accomplished, I intend to go beyond a superficial evaluation of the ideas of metalanguage and political manipulation to discuss possible explanations underlying the second-order semiotic system. In this way, a more scrutinized depiction of the motives behind the notions of appropriation and authenticity can be brought to the center of the debate. Also, unlike Sandke's enterprise to challenge racial myths within the jazz world by disclosing documented evidence (that is, to return to the mystified object its history), I am more interested in contemplating the Barthean myth in its prime. In other words, my aim is not to decipher, or balance out the exact truth behind these myths (although I may occasionally do so as a pretext for some other argument), but to describe and deconstruct the discursive layers empowering them so as to observe the complexities of racial identities while the myth contains its full force.

Signifyin(g) Theory, as I explained in the Introduction, is not a mythographic critical framework per se – or at least Gates refrains from categorizing it as such. Signifying has been a popular concern among New Jazz scholars for several years now, but none have regarded it from the perspective of its ability to produce myths. As I will try to demonstrate in the opening items of Part 3, the rhetoric of signifying can not only be regarded as an effective form of mythopoeia that has consolidated the formation of the African American aesthetic canon, but it also bears a resemblance to T.S. Eliot's mythical method; a resemblance which fits perfectly with the analyses of Ralph Ellison and Albert Murray.

Finally, I want to add that despite the fact that Burns's documentary has been the object of many scholars and critics, there is yet to be an analysis of how mythistory finds its niche within Burns's highly personalized form of historiography.

Before commencing the analyses, a final explanatory note on the basic terminology might be suitable for readers unacquainted with the field of mythographic studies. As we move into each of the methodologies, there might appear some shifts in the meanings of some of these terms, particularly in the case of Barthes, whose semiotic enclosure acutely distances the signification of myth from how Gates, Mali, or McNeill apply it. Still, a review of fundamental expressions that will recurrently appear can be beneficial, and in the few cases where semantic variation does take place, it will be clarified within the commentary about that specific methodology that opens each of the parts.

Let us begin with the term „myth,' by which we generally understand a particular story, usually of a foundational nature, that is part of the wider array of a mythology, that is, a body of cultural-specific narratives of an oral and/or written nature. In ancient Greece, „mythos' originally denoted „speech' or „word,' but the development of the term „logos' eventually quelled myth's primal meaning (Parmenides had initially used them as synonyms). In time, „logos' came to signify rational argument while myth was used to refer to fantasy (Coupe 2009: 10). When commenting Townsend's work, I mentioned that his usage of myth somewhat resembled W.W. Douglas's definition of the term as some form of illusion, a distorted convention. Indeed, there is a pattern in the understanding of myth to imply falsehood to a certain degree that can be traced as far back as to ancient Greek philosophy. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle used „muthos' to refer to emplotment. According to Paul Ricoeur, this emplotment doubly "signifies both fable (in the sense of an imaginary story) and plot (in the sense of a well constructed story)" (1991: 20-21). For centuries, myth became associated with other competing alternatives, from historicism to allegorical and symbolic outtakes, and it was especially during the seventeenth century and the Enlightenment when its equivalence to falsehood enjoyed a profound revivalism. Hobbes and Spinoza rejected myth on the basis of its antithetical nature to rationalism. Myth was furthermore berated by other notable voices such as that of Pierre Bayle, the prominent precursor of the encyclopedists. Bayle found myths to be a scandalous offense against logic and reasoning. In his *Historical and Critical Dictionary* (first published 1697 and enlarged in the subsequent 1702 edition), he referred to myths as "ridiculous stories" deriving in pagan religions that were nurtured by poets and several natural philosophers, whose labor "terminated very often in serious impieties" (Bayle 2000: 23). John Trenchard's *National History of Superstition* (1709)

also expanded on this idea with his correlation between myth and fanatic emotionalism, which according to him, was mainly due to the individual's weaknesses and "ignorance of causes" (2000: 37). Jewett and Lawrence have identified this generalized zeal of contestation against myth as the beginning of the "myth of mythlessness," or in other words, "the unexamined belief that scientific culture has transcended mythical forms of thought" (1977: 250). Despite period-long efforts to first separate myth from scientific thought, and then suppress it on the grounds of uselessness, superstition and falsity, Jewett and Lawrence suggests that the time for man to victoriously overcome and be in no need of myth is yet to come.

In contemporary culture, the acceptation of myth as synonymous with fantasy, falsity, lie, or illusion is well established, as pointed out by Douglas and suggested by Barthes. In jazz scholarship, as we have seen through the case of Townsend's work, myth is often used to evoke a series of erroneous, if not distorted, shared beliefs about the music. But this is just one of several possible interpretations that myth may offer. Partly divested of such a rigid definition, myth can also be understood in the manner of the romantics, as an aesthetic phenomenon with a rich variety of sources from which to creatively develop new works of art. The symbolic potential of myth was best articulated by Schelling, who entrusted in poets the mission to sustain the eternal principles encoded within mythologies:

> Every great poet is called upon to transform into something finished that part of the world that has been revealed to him, and, using this material, to create a proper mythology. The mythological world is always being formed, and the poet's own epoch can reveal only a part of it to the poet. This will continue until the distant time in which the spirit of the world will complete the poem to which it gave birth, and will transform the succession of the phenomena of the new world into simultaneity. (Qtd. Meletinski 2000: 10)

The prototypes and archetypes provided by myth not only represent a universal display of aesthetic possibilities, but, for example, can also reflect the archetypes of the psyche (Freud and Jung), function as a socializing force within primitive cultures justifying the specific hierarchy of the social order at hand (Frazer and Malinowski), encode the symbolism inherent to rites of passage (Van Gennep), or refer to paradigmatic eternal literary models of characters (John White and Ian Watt). Inevitably, depending on the school at hand, the definition and applicability of myth varies. The tangential essence

lies in the fact that most of these schools accept myth to be intrinsically bound to some form of plot, in the Aristotelian sense. Every myth contains a narrative which is delineative of a moment of crisis, illustrated through symbolic entities and their actions, before which the world was one way and after which the world became somehow different. These narrations are explorations of the world, and it is in their effort to adhere to history where their explanatory nature may blossom. Although it is believed that originally myths reflected only moments of creation and genesis, they can also construe time in its eschatological (from the Greek „eskhatos,' meaning „last' or „final') form. Similarly, they need not refer only to the actions of god-like figures (although this distinction is questionable to several myth specialists who rely on the existence of literary genres to provide categorical differentiations between myth, folk story, fairy tale, and epic, for instance). Ruiz de Elvira (2000) and García Gual (1981) opine that to limit mythological characters to deities or deified figures is too narrow a scope, and that more secularized personifications also have a prominent space within the mythologies of countless cultures.

To better comprehend what myth is, or can be, it is frequently helpful to attend to its purpose rather than meaning. As dramatic stories of a virtual past or future, or as narratives projecting a model figure for a culture, they provide a certain structure, an ordered way of understanding the world, where individual psychology, collective memory, and social behavior (often in the form of ritual) are poured into the formula. They resist entropy by presenting chaos and then ordering it (through the slaying of monsters, the killing of the father, sacrificial offerings, aesthetic versatility and individuality, etc.), a process which may refer to the cosmological or the established social order. The archetypes, therefore, are always dialectically construed in relation to the community, whether this be benevolent (and so the myth justifies the social order) or tyrannical (the myth challenges social hierarchies and regulations). Because of this, the poet or mythopoeic agent is incapable of depriving his or her narration from the agreement with the plurality of collectivity. In Maud Bodkin's words,

> When a poet uses the stories that have taken shape in the fantasy of the community, it is not his individual sensibility alone that he objectifies. Responding with unusual sensitiveness to the words and images which already express the emotional experience of the community, the poet arranges these so as to utilize to the full their evocative power. Thus he attains for himself vision and possession of the experience engendered

> between his own soul and the life around him, and communicates that experience, at once individual and collective, to others, so far as they can respond adequately to the words and images he uses. (1958: 8)

For the remainder of this study, we will follow, firstly, the Barthean definition of myth as a device for distortion and deformation (more closely related to falsehood) and on the subsequent chapters, the notion of myth as a narrative model in which (African) American archetypes and motifs are encoded. In both instances, it is important to keep in mind that myth's relevance is determined by its implications over a given community, whether it is based on the development of the white dominant culture's identity, African American identity, or the dialectic constructs between both races. In other words, the premise that myth is a socializing force is assumed.

A second term which requires explanation is the concept of „mytheme,' borrowed from Lévi-Strauss and by which we will refer to a series of minimal units within the myth which can only be identified and understood by comparison and contrast to other units. In narratology, the anatomy of mythemes is superior to that of other components such as phonemes, morphemes or sentences; what they bear is a syntagmatic relationship between a subject and a predicate. It is here where the basis of binary and ternary structures congenital to myth can be diagnosed. Myth articulates those contradictory mythemes and directs the narration towards some form of resolution between them. "The purpose of myth," wrote Lévi-Strauss, "is to provide a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction" (1955: 443). Lévi-Strauss advocated that the essential opposition of mythethemes developed when nature and culture acquired heterogeneous meanings. From thereon, other binary oppositions spawned: sacred / profane, masculine / feminine, order / chaos, life / death, self / other, etc. In jazz writing, mythemes have a capital importance, and to address them is to begin to understand not only the underlying social politics at work, but to articulate the basic mythical components on which the blues idiom is built. Some basic binary oppositions in jazz are, as I have attempted to illustrate thus far, black / white, high art / popular entertainment, revolutionary behavior / "Uncle Tomism," masculinity / femininity, primitiveness / modernity, purism / heresy, solo / ensemble, formal education / informal training, jazz / classical music, improvisation / written score, imitator / genius, etc.

The danger in these oppositions, like in any other binary system, does not stem from the neutral images of the mythemes themselves, but from the ideological value

bestowed upon them, that is, from hierarchical forces imposed upon them through socio-historical determinism. Consequently, within the binarism, one of the mythemes represents the positive or acceptable norm, while the other stands as the negative, disagreeable one. Depending on the epoch or the writer, different mythemes and binarisms are pushed to the forefront of the narration – however, the ethnic background of the writer, as I have argued, oftentimes leads to a similar position to that of other members of his or her own race. In other instances, and particularly as a result of postmodern experimentation of content and form, the original hierarchical system of a given binarism is inverted, or even balanced symmetrically. The irony within these or any form of hierarchy is that the components cannot function, or even mean anything unless they are placed against their symbolic counterpoint. Frequently mythologies are illustrated with superhuman figures that are able to transcend oppositions. These usually appear in the shape of bisexual entities. Henry Louis Gates describes effigies of Esu Elegbara in which the deity has breasts and a penis, and so do the Indian gods Shiva and Shakti appear under a single body. Duality and subsequent multiplicity symbolize, according to Joseph Campbell, the mystery of creation of every culture. "The devolvement of eternity into time, the breaking into the two and then the many, as well as the generation of new life through the reconjunction of the two" (Campbell 1973: 153-154) are recurrent structural motifs of universal myths.

As we will see, the importance of mythemes is especially highlighted in the deconstruction of mythical paradigms of jazz and blues-idiomatic narrative. By „mythical paradigms,' I refer to motifs and archetypal units within which the antinomies are encrypted. Some of the case examples which will be presented include the paradigms of time and space, paradigmatic heroes and heroines, paradigmatic myths of generations, paradigmatic myths of initiation, or paradigmatic myths of deliverance. Each paradigm is essentially structured by mythemes; for example, space in jazz writing generally answers to the antinomies North / South (and sometimes West), rural / urban settings, or dance hall / concert hall.

Another term to bear in mind is the concept of „monomyth,' borrowed by Joseph Campbell from Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* to refer to universal mythical patterns. The monomyth contains the tests and trials that the hero must successfully overcome throughout his journey. Set in a series of sequential stages, the monomyth provides a more complete and absolute mythological model than Van Gennep's more simplified

presentation of rites of passage. Campbell not only includes rites of passage, but also a diversity of motifs and archetypes that allow the hero's quest to be conceived as an insulated structure with circuitous tendencies that serves as a referent for the psyche's ego and unconscious. In Campbell's words, the journey is altogether one "from the tomb of the womb to the womb of the tomb" (1973: 12). Campbell's mergence of psychoanalysis and ritualism conveys an understanding of the monomyth as a collection of biologically-stimulated symbols that appear spontaneously and unarranged in dreams. His book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949) is an ordered alignment of such symbols for subsequent interpretation of the subject's subconscious and unconscious manifestations of imagery. Our purpose is not to engage into psychoanalytic intricacies and implications through jazz writing; however, the notion of monomyth facilitates the managing and interpreting of the path of fictional characters, especially with plots more oriented towards the development of a single protagonist, such as in Ralph Ellison's and Albert Murray's fiction.

Lastly, a final remark should be made on how the term „ritual' is applied in this study. As a result of the influence of Frazer, Malinowski, Lévy-Bruhl and Cassirer, scholars consolidated the relationship between literature and ethnography around the late 1940s and 1950s, and ritual became a central concern from which to approach the narrative text. Attempts to decipher the meaning of ritual in literary pieces had been notably accomplished by Gilbert Murray in *The Rise of the Greek Epic* (1907) and *Hamlet and Orestes* (1914), and by Jessie Weston in *From Ritual to Romance* (1920), but it was by mid-century when the study of ritual and literature reached its climax. Maud Bodkin, Northrop Frye, John Lyndenberg, and Charles Olson, among other names, centered their studies on the depiction of rites in the works of Dante and Milton, Blake, Faulkner, and Melville, respectively, and on the mythic origin of literature in itself. It must be clarified that these scholars mark a clear distinction between ritual in its relation to myth and ritual as manifested in literature; that is, they only approach ritual by way of how it is represented in the text, not through any belief that literature in itself is ritualistic. Such an idea would be antithetical to their theories about the relationship between myth and literature. According to Robert A. Segal,

> For literary myth-ritualists, myth becomes literature when it is severed from ritual. Myth tied to ritual is religious literature; myth cut off from ritual is secular literature, or mere literature. When tied to ritual, myth can serve any

> of the active functions ascribed to it by the myth-ritualists. Myth bereft of ritual is demoted to mere commentary. (2004: 10)

In this study, I will undertake the same strategy as that of these scholars in the approach and usage of ritual; I concentrate on the rhetorical devices and artifices employed in literature to represent, and also to emulate, the patterns and crafts involved in the rite.

By „ritual,' I refer to the enactment of certain behavioral patterns encoded and established by a certain cultural or sub-cultural group. Its execution is determined and bound to a series of accepted norms not necessarily dictated in written form but certainly institutionalized within the shared conventions of the culture or group at hand. Inherent to rituals is the metamorphosis of the performer (and by extension, the transformation of the entire group), through a symbolic conquering or overcoming of a threshold, a step beyond the crossroads where the initiated was yet in the process of acquiring his necessary skills. Many of these rituals, as I have indicated, were documented by Neil Leonard from an anthropological prism, and it is their customized reflection in narrative form, and particularly in fiction, which is of interest for this thesis. Rituals are substantial prerequisites of the monomyth, and in jazz narratives they are frequently depicted to illustrate a stage within the hero's journey. As we will see, for Albert Murray, the hero's final slaying of the dragon cannot be terminated without prior apprenticeship, knowledge, and control of blues-idiomatic rituals. For other writers, jazz rituals only embody the bestiality of the black race, and for others, the dominion of the ritual signified a crossing not towards perfection of technique, but to become part of the other racial group. In addition to this, rituals are illustrative reflections of how writers suggest the cyclic motioning of time; they ensure the natural order of the idiom towards an end that marks a new beginning.

The relationship between myth and ritual is not without its complications, however, and for this reason I refrain from positioning myself within the two debates that have marked the history of mythography: whether rituals antecede or are the result of myth, and whether myths are the explanatory narratives to ritual. It is also the case of jazz oral stories that rituals without a myth may appear, as well as myths without a concomitant ritual. The reason behind this could lead to endless speculation (perhaps the supplementing myth or ritual has been lost in history; or perhaps there was never a coupling in the first place) that would only result in a thwarting from the main objectives of this dissertation. There are no grounds to think that any of these arguments

will be reaching a satisfactory solution any time soon, and therefore I have deemed it preferable not to dwell on hypotheses about what came first, or why the rite or myth is missing its counterpart.

This section has aimed to familiarize the reader with the key concerns around which jazz studies revolves through a schematic description of early jazz criticism and scholarship and its evolvement towards New Jazz Studies, an overview of the latest research on jazz and myth and the interpretative diversity they offer, and a commentary on the innovations presented in this study as a heir to all these works. In the following parts, I continue to stress the concept of a jazz writing tradition not only to re-emphasize the organic flux between past and present works, but also because it is crucial to understand that jazz writing has a capital role in the shaping of the canon and the grand jazz narrative. As to further mythographic and mythopoeic terminology, additional myth-related concepts will be appropriately defined and contextualized within jazz writing as we move along the analyses.

PART 2

BARTHEAN MYSTIFICATION AND THE POLITICS OF RACE

In this section I examine Barthean forms of mystification through a depiction of texts and narratives where the qualitative dichotomies installed by racial and class opposites are manifested. The section is dedicated exclusively to the consideration of texts by Euro American writers in an endeavor that seeks to chronologically trace the evolvement of white perception of jazz for almost half a century. By following the methods through which myth adapts itself to the new sociopolitical contexts of the twentieth century, we may better appreciate the mythopoeic perpetuity of certain stereotypes and racial assumptions through countercultural mythographic conventions. I begin by first providing a brief explanation of the theory and then examining the likely reasons why jazz has a propensity to being colonized by mystification. After this, I analyze the functioning of the rhetoric of mystification in early pro and anti-jazz criticism to expose the dominating binarisms inherent to white reception of the music. I pepper the corpus with a few representative excerpts from European writers, so as to suggest the transatlantic connections of the mystification and the weight of European

thought within the development of a truly American aesthetic. The last two items are devoted to the evaluation of mystification in Carl Van Vechten's *Nigger Heaven*, Mezz Mezzrow's *Really the Blues* and John Clellon Holmes's *The Horn.* From the 1910s to the late 1950s, the interests of Euro American culture move towards a growing acceptance of the African American and his aesthetic. However, what this section argues is that although the intentionality behind mythical language may shift, assimilation of the culture of the „other' is never truly freed of supremacist convictions. The selection of material, therefore, is not one solely based on race, but one that aims to consider the preponderance of Barthean mystification developed by different groups within the white hegemony: from the early upper-class Eurocentric vision of those cultivated in the classical taste of the elite to the enthusiastic responses of record collectors and journalists without a deep education in musicology, and from the 1920s aesthetes to the 1950s hipster and Beat. Other prominent pieces were surveyed for the providing of a cohesive and coherent diachronic review of mystification. Most notably, Eudora Welty's short story, "Powerhouse," whose protagonist is based on the legendary Fats Waller, and Dorothy Baker's novella *Young Man with a Horn*, based on the tragic life of Bix Beiderbecke would have contributed additional insight for the identification of the similarities shared by white writers in their fictionalization of acknowledged jazz musicians. But because one of the objectives was to prove the sustainability of mythical speech even within white groups that in principle contradicted one another, I have deemed it preferable to limit the analysis to representative pieces that may address not only the complexities of race relations in the first half of the twentieth century, but also point to the frictions arising with the emergence of America as the epitome of capitalism. Furthermore, as we collect the racist stereotypes and hierarchical antinomies articulated in the discourse surrounding jazz musicians and jazz rituals, I aim to establish the historical foundations over which the current debate about racial ownership of jazz was cemented on.

2.1. ROLAND BARTHES'S MYSTIFYING THEORY: AN OVERVIEW

In his seminal work *Mythologies* (first published in 1957) and in his later collection of essays, *Image –Music – Text* (1977), Roland Barthes provided a semiologic model to interpret contemporary layers of ideology and their hierarchical, suppressive qualities. The material he uses for analysis are the messages implicit in modern mediums of communication, from film and photography to postmodern literature, publicity slogans, television commercials, and the shapes and labels endorsing the consumption of goods such as toys, soap-powders, and basic dieting commodities (wine and milk, steak and chips, etc.). All these elements and devices, which define and articulate the psychosocial necessities of the bourgeoisie, are microscopically reduced to their latent aptitudes as mystifying vessels, where the double discourse of myth germinates and launches clusters of additional information that reconfigure the essential, pre-ideological values of the sign. It is the dynamics of information that are Barthes's main concerns, not only in terms of their calculated structure but also in terms of their underlying intentionality and the effects such an established communicative code between the higher principles of the bourgeois ideology and the individual have over the articulation of Western culture. Stepping beyond the more ethnographic understandings of myth in which a recompilation of primitive mythologies and rituals seemed to be the starting point for an accurate mythographic study, Barthes turns to the notion of myth as speech to address how the contingencies of political fabrication manipulate the message whilst avoiding the identification and classification of bourgeois thinking.[12] As Michael Tager notes, for Barthes, "myths occurred in fragments, not in long fixed narratives" (1986: 631).

[12] Laurence Coupe argues that Barthes's terminology in *Mythologies* is misleading, for it resembles more closely the science of ideology than that of myth. He refers to Barthes's system as "a kind of political allegory" that consistently "repeats the same point," which is "that beneath the apparently natural there lies the cultural" (Coupe 2009: 148). In his view, such a scope digresses into a work that "is less about mythology than about ideology," where "the two terms are interchangeable" (Coupe 2009: 147). Although Coupe's observation is justified by sound reasoning, in this study, because of the shared, contemporary understanding of myth as an illusion, I accept Barthes's definition of myth to be as equally valid and substantial as the definitions stemming from ethnography or archetypal theory.

Barthean mystification, therefore, falls into the province of semiology, and although a strict semiological analysis will not be the basis from which to approach jazz writing (we will focus instead on the higher rhetoric of "Myth on the Right"), a brief summary of the workings of semiotic units should be given.

According to Barthes, myth is not an object, nor a concept, nor an idea; it is a type of speech, a mode of signification. A type of speech is not to be confused with a type of language: language alludes to the kind of medium, whether verbal or visual, whereas speech entails the science of semiology, absorbing all forms of language to focus on the type of social usage that is ascribed to them by history. Semiology, according to Barthes, "is a science of forms, since it studies signification apart from their content" (1972: 111). When it comes to the case object or medium, myth knows no boundaries. As a type of speech, that is, as a message, myth has the potential to infuse its powers over anything that has a cultural significance in the world, that is, over anything that language has appropriated and bestowed with a "signifying consciousness" (1972: 110). To put it more simply, for something (an object, material, concept, or idea) to elude mythical speech requires an absence of that object from language altogether. If man constructs reality through language, then anything which is yet unknown or is yet to be discovered, created, mused upon, or invented, cannot be affected by mythical speech for the simple reason that it bears no place in the world. This leaves little conceivable space for elements that could resist myth – myth, therefore, can or can potentially spawn within the discourse about any subject matter:

> Myth is not defined by the object of its message, but by the way in which it utters this message: there are no formal limits to myth, there are no „substantial' ones. Everything, then, can be a myth? Yes, I believe this, for the universe is infinitely fertile in suggestions. Every object in the world can pass from a closed, silent existence to an oral state, open to appropriation by society, for there is no law, whether natural or not, which forbids talking about things. (Barthes 1972: 109)

The fact that anything can be affected by myth does not imply that myth always maintains the same force, in qualitative and quantitative terms. If the first condition is that the element has to have been previously appropriated by language, the second stipulation to keep in mind is that there are a set of variables which determine the success and „life-span' of myth. These variables are dependent on the nature of the

language that has appropriated them and on the manner and artifices it has used to do so. Let us illustrate with our case: we can establish, so far, that jazz or the blues idiom are not myths; it is the patterns of speech about them that is mythical, a speech which layers itself over the first form of signification that jazz and the blues idiom produced. Secondly, that jazz is more susceptible to myth than say, mathematical language or infomercials, for example, is because the system of signification, which is intrinsically bound to historical context, meets a series of conditions, which I will describe later on, that favor the growth of mythical speech. As a preview, let me remind the reader that myth is the language of the bourgeoisie; the bourgeoisie of twentieth-century America is the middle and upper-class white society, and it is their way of dealing and manipulating racial relations at a time of segregation and delicate steps towards integration which is responsible for the vast amount of mythical speech pertaining to the most popular black aesthetics at the time, jazz and the blues.

If myth can only develop once the first order of signification has been established, then myth represents a system where a discourse and a metadiscourse function simultaneously. In the first order, a signifier and a signified make up a sign or meaning; this is the basis of language. But through the second order, the sign represents a mere signifier (what Barthes terms the mythical „form') which is again adhered to a new signified, resulting in a new global sign or „signification.' Barthes uses the example of a photo of a Negro in a French uniform saluting the flag. The totality of the photo (the Negro saluting the flag) represents the meaning, the sign of the first order. This meaning is taken as the signifier of the second order, bringing on the signified elements of Frenchness and militariness to establish a final signification: "that France is a great empire, that all her sons, without any colour discrimination, faithfully serve under her flag" (Barthes 1972: 116). It is in the passing of the sign of the first order from representing meaning to representing form where myth begins. This passing is a process whereupon the sign is emptied and impoverished through a deprivation of its history (in this case the Negro's history). The sign ceases, or suspends its historical association with the sole purpose of nourishing the second-order semiological system: "form does not suppress the meaning, it only impoverishes it, it puts it at a distance . . . the meaning loses its value, but keeps its life, from which the form of the myth will draw its nourishment" (Barthes 1972: 118). This process is one of distortion and deformation, never one of elimination or hiding. Myth self-regulates its use of the sign as meaning

and as form, and a new history is implanted, one which will serve the purpose of the dominant ideology.

To address the motivation or concept behind the insemination of a new history is to direct attention towards the global intentionality of myth as a device of appropriation and myth as a value. While the sign of the first order may have been arbitrary, there is nothing accidental about the final signification of the second order. The analogies supplied between meaning and form are necessary steps, for "there is no myth without motivated form" (Barthes 1972: 126). This motivation has a final reason for being: the transformation of history into nature. By naturalization, Barthes refers to the act by which mythical speech is received as a reason, not as a motive; the distortion that has manipulated the principle of equivalence typical of semiology renders the message as one based on causality. This appearance of there being an inductive relationship between signifier and signified functions best when it is presented through immediate impressions, when the receiver of myths is led to assume the apparent causality, without questioning it. All in all, to get back to our example, the Negro has been „robbed' of his meaning, his history, to naturalize the concept of the French Empire.

There is a reason why Barthes shows his preference towards a synchronic study of contemporary myth. In his view, "our society is the privileged field of mythical significations" (1972: 137) because of its bourgeois hegemony. He sees the bourgeoisie as a sort of "joint-stock company" (1972: 137) in which a certain ideology is continuously transmitted in every object (this is of special importance, considering the fact that consumerism and capitalism constitute the main economic axis of the regime) whilst the social dominating class resists a meticulous definition of itself:

> As an economic fact, the bourgeoisie is *named* without any difficulty: capitalism is openly professed. As a political fact, the bourgeoisie has some difficulty in acknowledging itself: there are no „bourgeois' parties in the Chamber. As an ideological fact, it completely disappears: the bourgeoisie has obliterated its name in passing from reality to representation, from economic man to mental man. (Barthes 1972: 138)

The term „bourgeoisie' is dissolved within the wider, more acceptable concept of „the nation,' where connotations of hierarchy and domination are camouflaged and where its interests can be, or appear to be fragmented. The manner by which the regime encodes its messages, that is, through myth, can be gathered as a matrix of ramifications where

"the unwritten norms of interrelationships in bourgeois society" (Barthes 1972: 140) are distributed. In this way does the bourgeoisie naturalize its own role in the world, eternalizing and never explaining it but providing, instead, a simplification of essences. These essences are the result of the depoliticizing of speech through myth; since the bourgeoisie squirms from defining itself, it must articulate its functions and products in a way to make them appear innocent and natural, so as to not expose itself. Furthermore, Barthes claims that the metalanguage of man as producer is not mythical. On the basis that myth can never develop within leftist ideology because it refuses to depoliticize itself, he establishes that mythical speech can only occur in depoliticized, right-wing language. This is not a contradiction to his earlier statement in which he determined that everything is susceptible to myth; it is one thing to say that the metalanguage of man as producer is not mythical, but this does not mean that depoliticized speech, in the interest of the right, cannot impregnate and naturalize it. What is restored, of course, is not the language of emancipation and the language of revolution characteristic of the left, but a series of images where that particular history that had aimed to subvert the system is now deemed as part of the dominant regime itself in a disguised expression of apparent liberalism. In Barthes's words:

> The oppressed is nothing, he has only one language, that of his emancipation; the oppressor is everything, his language is rich, multiform, supple, with all the possible degrees of dignity at its disposal: he has an exclusive right to meta-language. The oppressed *makes* the world, he has only an active, transitive (political) language; the oppressor conserves it, his language is plenary, intransitive, gestural, theatrical: it is Myth. The language of the former aims at transforming, of the latter at eternalizing. (1972: 149)

What are the rhetorical devices that are most frequently used in bourgeois mystification? We shall analyze these as we consider our body of jazz texts, but it is for now important to point out that these regulating, linguistic forms answer to the mission of myth to naturalize and depoliticize. The principal figures gathered by Barthes are inoculation, the process by which a certain degree of accidental evil is admitted and acknowledged; the privation of history, whereupon "things lose the memory that they once were made" (Barthes 1972: 142); identification, the process by which the bourgeois man assimilates the „other' through exoticism; tautology, which is fostered by the need for authority; neither-norism, in which two opposites are balanced against each

other and finally rejected; the quantification of quality, which appeals to the scientific refuge of the regime; and the statement of fact, which endorses the universality of an established content and predicate. These figures are highly symptomatic of an up-down hierarchy that bestows value upon the oppressor / oppressed binarism.

There are two main ways by which the Barthean myth can be deciphered. The first answers to the semiological practice of focusing on the second-order signifier as a compound of meaning and form; the mythographer identifies the act of distortion and restores the relationship of equivalence to undo the appearance of causality. Related to this, though belonging more to the field of ideology than to semiology, is the second way, through which the mythographer focuses on the signifier as "an inextricable whole made of meaning and form" (Barthes 1972: 128) and therefore shifts his interest to the underlying intentionality, the motivation behind the distortion. Originally, this observation of intentionality was only the first stage towards the purification of the object; the mythographer was then to return to the object its history, as it was before being impoverished and distorted by the metalanguage. But in the almost twenty years spanning between the publication of *Mythologies* and *Image – Music – Text*, the mythographer's role sort of freezes in the first stage so as to open another doorway, one which is not necessarily concerned with the purification of the object but with contemplating the spatial reach-outs of myth at a transnational level. This path is the third way a mythographer can take, and it deals with matters such as "what are the articulations, the displacements, which make up the mythological tissue of mass consumer society?" (Barthes 1977: 167). In *Image – Music –Text*, Barthes notes that what has changed in recent years is not the nature of myth itself, which is just as fruitful and elusive as two decades earlier, but the "science of reading" (1977: 166) myths. The mythographer has switched from the field of semiology to that of sociolects and ideoloctology, where "the operational concepts would no longer be sign, signifier, signified, and connotation but citation, reference, and stereotype" (Barthes 1977: 168). Consequently, so has the mythographer's labor changed in its nature, for "if the alienation of society still demands the demystification of languages (and notably the language of myths)," Barthes explains, "the direction this combat must take is not, is no longer, that of critical decipherment but that of *evaluation*" (1977: 168). Although I am somewhat uneasy with the separation between decipherer and evaluator in quality and in

contextual period of action,[13] I shall label my own role as that of evaluator for the sake of simplicity. My aim is not to purify jazz or the blues idiom, but to discuss some reasons why jazz as a concept may have been susceptible to mystification during the first decades of its development and to analyze the manner in which certain stereotypes are produced and spread by the bourgeoisie through the use of the previously listed rhetorical figures. Once having evaluated these procedures, we will then turn to analyze mythical speech in the narrative works.

[13] My reservations stem from the fact there are current significant contributions, such as Sandke's *Where the Dark and the Light Folks Meet*, in which valuable historical detail is recuperated to 'purify' jazz whilst an evaluative effort "to change the object itself, to produce a new object" (Barthes 1977: 169) is made.

2.2. JAZZ AND BARTHEAN MYSTIFICATION

Let us evaluate some theoretical reasons for which jazz has proven, throughout history, to be highly susceptible to myth-making. In *Mythologies*, Barthes claims that "in general, myth prefers to work with poor, incomplete images, where the meaning is already relieved of its fat, and ready for signification, such as caricatures, pastiches, symbols, etc." (1972: 127). Later on, he places mathematical language as the paradigmatic example in which the meaning's fullness protects the essence from the metalanguage and from the colonization of myth, whereby myth must go "around" it to carry out its parasitical function: "myth takes it away en bloc; it takes a certain mathematical formula ($E = mc^2$), and makes this unalterable meaning the pure signifier of mathematicity" (Barthes 1972: 132). Although myth finds a way to satisfy its motivation, initially, mathematics' rigorous order and exactness provide an impenetrable shield where empirism insulates the language from interpretation. The case of jazz and the blues idiom, I argue, represents quite the opposite extreme to mathematical language. From the first time that the bourgeoisie began taking notice of the music, the concept of jazz had a vacillating image, dragging with it a series of negative associations. Contrary to the scrupulousness of other concepts where the meaning strongly objects, or at least resists, slanted judgment, the origins of the aesthetic brought with it numerous associations ramifying into groups of concepts that were already caricaturized through metaphor and metonymy: Negritude, brothels, the decadent South, Semitism, slavery, bestiality, poverty, etc. To attend to the stereotyping and mystification of each of these concepts is an arduous journey that has been undertaken by hundreds of scholars in an effort to return to them their silenced, rightful history. The fact that jazz signified upon all these categories, which, inserted within the hierarchy of value dualisms, connoted the detrimental, unpropitious side of civilization, indicates that from the time of its birth it was condemned, at least for a few decades, to magnetically incite mythical speech. The „fat' nurturing the meaning of jazz and the blues was understood by certain black groups of lower castes (in general, the African American middle class did little to understand or endorse its prospects) with no viable resource to expound it other than playing it within those circles. Dominating the written medium were the white upper and middle classes, and they encountered little

intransigence from advocates of this pure meaning of jazz, which made mystification an easy affair.

Jazz was an impoverished concept beginning in its name. The true etymology of jazz has never been unearthed, which has led, up to the present day, to endless speculation. In *Jazz: A Century of Change*, Lewis Porter writes that "the problem in tracing the word is that it originated in slang, that is, as a spoken and not written word. . . . Not one theory about the origin of the word has been proven true, and many have been proven false" (2004: 1). Indeed, notorious disputes as to where the term came from and what it originally signified have taken place regularly since the birth of jazz. A number of theories have driven journalists, enthusiasts, musicians, and scholars to search for its factual source in different contextual settings: from the semantic fields of sports and sex to borrowed terms from France, Native Americans, Creole Patois, West Africa, and Saudi Arabia. In *Juba to Jive: A Dictionary of African American Slang*, Clarence Major writes the following entry:

> Jazz . . . [is] very likely a modern word for *jaja* (Bantu), which means to dance, to play music . . . possibly a Creole version of the Ki-Kongo word *dinza*, and the early New Orleans variant „jizz'; also, from Creole *patois* („to speed things up'); another, less likely theory has it that „jazz' is derived from the African word *jaiza* – the sound of far-off drums. (2004: 2)

On August 5, 1917, Walter Kingsley published an article in the *New York Sun* in which he attested to the African origin, thus supporting the theory given by Lafcadio Hearn in his study of Creole patois and New Orleans idioms. According to Kingsley, "the word was African in origin," common "on the Gold Coast of Africa and in the hinterland of Cape Coast Castle." It meant "to speed things up, to make excitement," and was brought to the South of the United States and adopted by the creoles "as a term to be applied to the music of a rudimentary, syncopated type" (Kingsley 2007: 479). This theory has not satisfied everyone. Robert Hendrickson wrote a few decades later that "attempts to trace the word „jazz' to an African word meaning hurry have failed, and it is doubtful that it derives from either the *chasse* dance step; the Arab *Jazib*, „one who allures'; the African *jaiza*, „the sound of distant drums'; or the Hindu *jazba*, „the ardent desire'" (2001: 24). Recently, Joaquim Romaguera i Ramió has also suggested a Catalan association with the origin of the word:

> Existe [un término] . . . que guarda una clara relación con „excitar,' *jass* o *jazz* que se usa en la jerga yanqui para designar ciertas relaciones sexuales que se establecen en determinados antros. Nos referimos al vocablo catalán *jaç*, que es algo así como un camastro o cualquier superficie apta para echarse y descansar, para „yacer,' vamos. La aceptación 4 de „yacer' del Diccionario de la Lengua Española (R.A.E., 1994) reza así: "Tener trato carnal con una persona," o sea que el parentesco es diáfano, al tiempo que fonético: *jass*, *jazz*, *jaç*. (2002: 25)

Adding to the mystery of the linguistic etymology, there were also numerous imaginative stories conjuring the moment when the word was used for the first time. Kingsley establishes the possibility of having extended from minstrelsy and vaudeville terminology: "When a vaudeville act needs ginger the cry from the advisors in the wings is „put in jaz,' meaning add low comedy, go to high speed and accelerate the comedy spark" (2007: 479). Alan P. Merriman's and Fradley H. Garner's work was instrumental in collecting a series of folk tales starring a certain black musician by the name of Jasbo (although there are recorded and published variations with the names James, Jasper, Jess, and even Charles, shortened to „Chaz'), who under the influence of alcohol, starts playing music in a loud and crazy manner. The people around encourage him to keep going, crying "Jasbo it up!" and then "Jas it up!" (Merriman and Garner 1998). Still another direction the story would take was the belief that in the late nineteenth century there had once been a New Orleans band led by a Mr. Razz, a ragtime drummer. Another more humorous story is one retold by Henry Osgood in 1926:

> As far back as twenty years a blind newsboy known to his particular gang as „Stale Bread,' felt the creep of the „blues' coming on him and translated them on a fiddle acquired from a minstrel show passing through town. With his moaning, soothing melodies he was soon threatening to corner the trade, playing as he sold his papers. Then one by one other denizens of the street, picking up the strain and whatever instruments they could lay their hands on, joined him until there were five, christened by their leader as „Stale Bread's Spasm Band.' (1926: 36)

Many were not charmed by these charismatic stories. Irving Schwerke dismissed the tales as products of fantasy and proof of "how ridiculous writings of jazz have been, and how little they are worth" (Qtd. Merriman and Garner 1998: 12).

The offensiveness of jazz stemmed less from these imaginary stories bordering on the absurd than from the sexual symbolism connoted by the name. As ragtime and stride piano flowered in the bordellos of Storyville, the red-light district of New Orleans, and as the blues were increasingly being urbanized as well in this distinct atmosphere, the associations between the music and illicit, immoral behavior triggered a discourse less concerned about the etymology than about the images that the term conjured. Garvin Bushell recorded the widely-held acceptance that the word was borrowed from the fragrances of prostitutes:

> They said that the French had brought the perfume industry with them to New Orleans, and the oil of jasmine was a popular ingredient locally. To add it to a perfume was called „jassing it up.' The strong scent was popular in the red-light district, where a working girl might approach a prospective customer and say, "Is jass on your mind tonight, young fellow?" The term had become synonymous with erotic activity and came to be applied to the music as well. (Qtd. Crow 1990: 19)

In 1924, an article titled "Where is Jazz Leading America?" was published in the widely distributed periodical, *The Étude*, where a number of musicians recalled their first experience hearing the music. A certain Clay Smith, stated that:

> If the truth were known about the origin of the word „jazz' it would never be mentioned in polite society. . . . Like all adolescent boys let loose on the world I naturally received information that was none too good for me and was piloted by ignorant men to dance resorts. . . . These dance resorts were known as „Honky-Tonks' – a name which in itself suggests some of the rhythms of jazz. The vulgar word „jazz' was in general currency in those dance halls thirty years or more ago. . . . The vulgar dances that accompany some of the modern jazz are suggestive of the ugly origin of the word. (2002: 355)

More conjectures include the etymological links between the term „jazz' and the slang words „gism' and „jasm,' which refer to semen, and the connections between „jass' and „ass.' Duke Ellington was famously quoted for stating that "by and large, jazz has always been like the kind of man you wouldn't want your daughter to associate with. The *word* „jazz' has been part of the problem. The word never lost its association with those New Orleans bordellos" (Qtd. Butler 2002: xvi). Ellington understood the connection to be in detriment of the message that he was trying to convey about black

aesthetics in America. In his autobiography, he would add that "we stopped using the word in 1943, and we much prefer to call it the American Idiom, or the Music of the Freedom of Expression" (Ellington 1973: 309). Although a quixotic gesture, it proved to be an impracticable task. As late as the 1960s the entry for the term jazz in the *Dictionary of American Slang* was:

> jazz n. 1 [taboo] Copulation; the vagina; sex; a woman considered solely as a sexual object. Original southern Negro use, probably since long before 1900– 2 Animation; enthusiasm; enthusiasm and a fast tempo or rhythm; frenzy. 3 The only original American music, traditionally known for its emotional appeal, rhythmic emphasis, and improvisation. (Wentworth and Flexner 1960: 286)

By the 1960s, there had been a growing acceptance of jazz as a national, patriotic expression; however, as we can see, the more risqué nuances were still very much alive.

Interestingly enough, in 1938, folk etymologist Peter Tamony found that the word first appeared in print in March 3, 1913 in an article on baseball in the *San Francisco Bulletin* by E.T. „Scoop' Gleeson. Gleeson wrote that "McCarl has been heralded all along as a „busher' but now it develops that this dope is very much to the „jazz'" (Qtd. Wilton 2002: 121). Three days later, on March 6, Gleeson again used the term:

> Everybody has come back full of that old „jazz' and [the San Francisco Seals] promise to knock the fans off their feet with their playing. What is the „jazz'? Why, it's a little of that old life, the old „gin-i-ker,' the „pep,' otherwise known as the enthusiasalum [*sic*]. A grain of „jazz' and you feel like going out and eating your way through Twin Peaks. The team which speeded into town this morning comes pretty close to representing the pick of the army. Its members have trained on ragtime and „jazz' and manager Dell Howard says there is no stopping them. (Qtd. Wilton 2002: 121)

Baseball slang is a dialect of its own; what seems of essence, anyhow, is firstly, that this seems to suggest that perhaps the term did not appear in New Orleans at first, but in the West Coast. Secondly, the term seems to maintain the same reference to some form of excitement or enthusiasm in a similar sense to that of the suppositions presented above („to speed things up,' „to dance'). It is hard to say whether there are any implicit allusions to any form of sexual arousal; if there are, they are of a very subtle and innocent nature. What is evident is that the degree to which the word „jazz,' when

associated to the music, connoted sexuality is in an entirely different level than when applied in the semantic field of baseball. As we venture into the topic of primitivism, we will expand on the sexual forms ascribed to jazz and on the relevance of Storyville as space of genesis. For now, however, it is enough to point out the vacillating alternatives affecting the term „jazz' itself so as to emphasize the great extent to which the concept has been impoverished and has hence been made susceptible to mythical colonization.

Adjacent to the disparate etymological theories was also the arduous task of defining the music itself, a problem which Lewis Porter (2004) has pointed out. What was jazz, exactly? How was it different or how had it been influenced by ragtime, stride piano, and the blues? Endeavors to set aside the characteristics of the music itself proved to be much more complex than focusing on the term. If we were to rely on the meaning of the concept within only a first semiological order, the task would be less troublesome. But as mythical speech also made its way into the signification of jazz as music, the musicological characteristics nurturing that meaning are set aside, suspended for the benefit of intentionality and its bourgeois arguments. One can only imagine the disparate theories that have dawned on the demarcations of what jazz is and what jazz is not. At the expense of evaluating musical qualities, many anti-jazz advocates became torch bearers against what the music signified: a tainting of moral values. In 1921, the highly opinionated Anne Shaw Faulkner raged against the music on the basis of its analogies, not on its implicit characteristics: "We have all been taught to believe that „music soothes the savage beast,'" she says, "but we have never stopped to consider that an entirely different type of music might invoke savage instincts" (2002: 152). She goes on to add that "never in the history of our land have there been such immoral conditions, and in surveys made by many organizations, the blame is laid on jazz and its evil influence on the young" (Faulkner 2002: 152). The article, poignantly called "Does Jazz Put the Sin in Syncopation?" is an interesting case example of how musical characteristics cease to be interpreted in purely aesthetic terms and draw instead on the advancements in the study of psychology and physiology to find its signification. The following excerpts are lengthy but significant to illustrate my argument:

> Jazz is neither a definite form nor a type of rhythm; it is rather a *method* employed by the interpreter. Familiar hymn tunes can be jazzed until their original melodies are hardly recognizable. Jazz does for harmony what the accented syncopation of ragtime does for rhythm. In ragtime the rhythm is

> thrown out of joint, as it were, thus distorting the melody; in jazz exactly the same thing is done to the harmony. The melodic line is disjointed and disconnected by the accenting of the partial instead of the simple tone, and the same effect is produced on the melody and harmony which is noticed in syncopated rhythm. The combination of syncopation and the use of these inharmonic partial tones produces a strange, weird effect, which has been designated „jazz.'
>
> The jazz orchestra uses only those instruments which can produce partial, inharmonic tones more readily than simple tones – such as the saxophone, the clarinet and the trombone, which share honors with the percussion instruments that accent syncopated rhythm. The combination of the syncopated rhythm, accentuated by the constant use of the partial tones sounding off-pitch, has put syncopation too off-key. Thus the three simple elements of music – rhythm, melody and harmony – have been put out of tune with each other. (Faulkner 2002: 153)

So far, Faulkner has attacked every musical element that somehow poses an offense against classical standards. The dissonant effect of jazz was common among those familiarized with the refined, intellectually-appealing and spiritually charged formalisms of traditional taste. Opinions are inevitable, of course, but what is of interest is the follow-up to these two paragraphs, placed under a heading titled "Its Effects":

> Jazz originally was the accompaniment of the voodoo dancer, stimulating the half-crazed barbarian to the vilest deeds. The weird chant, accompanied by the syncopated rhythm, also has been employed by other barbaric people to stimulate brutality and sensuality. That it has a demoralizing effect upon the human brain has been demonstrated by many scientists. . . .
>
> The human organism responds to musical vibrations. What instincts then are aroused in jazz? Certainly not the deeds of valor or marital courage, for all marches and patriotic hymns are of regular rhythm and simple harmony; decidedly not contentment or serenity, for the songs of home and the love of native land are all of the simplest melody and harmony with noticeably regular rhythm. Jazz disorganizes all regular laws and order; it stimulates to extreme deeds, to a breaking away from all rules and conventions; it is harmful and dangerous and its influence is wholly bad.
>
> A number of scientific men who have been working on experiments in music-therapy with the insane, declare that while regular rhythms and simple tones produce a quieting effect on the brain of even a violent patient, the effect of jazz on the normal brain produces an atrophied condition on the brain cells of conception, until very frequently those under the demoralizing influence of the persistent use of syncopation, combined with enharmonic partial tones, are actually incapable of distinguishing between good and evil, between right and wrong. (Faulkner 2002: 153)

Faulkner naturalizes the meaning of the first semiological order (jazz has, among other musical features, a syncopated rhythm), impoverishing it and keeping its life, "from which the form of the myth [draws] its nourishment" (Barthes 1972: 118). The intended result is for the music to signify psychological corruption and demoralization, skipping from the musicological to the kinesthetic and then, ultimately, to the high art / popular culture debate. Among the authorities to support these sorts of arguments was Dr. Henry Van Dyke, a professor at Princeton University who made an anti-jazz speech at the 1921 National Education Association convention in Atlantic City for teachers. Apparently, Dr. Van Dyke had written a letter to Faulkner stating that jazz was "merely an irritation of the nerves of hearing, a sensual teasing of the strings of physical passion" and "an unmitigated cacophony, a combination of disagreeable sounds in complicated discords, a willful ugliness and a deliberate vulgarity" (Qtd. Faulkner 2002: 154). In the same line, Van Dyke's address at the convention was not exactly an act of scientific revelation, but rather another appeal to fight for the virtue of music, to relieve it from the danger of jazz corruption. Divorcing art from morals would desecrate the world, leaving it as though "it had been gone over by the German army or cursed with an Egyptian plague," for jazz was "invented by demons for the torture of imbeciles" (Qtd. Anonym. 1921).

Yet not all white responses to early jazz were so downright condemning. In 1930, music critic Sigmund Spaeth still argued that "jazz is not music," but "a *treatment* applied to music" (2005: 276), echoing Faulkner's claim that jazz is a method. Spaeth's subsequent argument is not based on deconstructing the truth of this statement, but on marking the evolution of jazz towards a higher art form in the hands of figures such as Gershwin – and by extension, white symphonic jazz composers. Previous to the work of these men, jazz had been "merely a raucous and inarticulate shouting of hoarse-throated instruments," but Gershwin proves (though not without a certain amount of flaws stemming from what Spaeth views as a professional inexperience at an orchestral level) that "basic musical ideas . . . [can] sparkle with individual genius and the jazz treatment [can be] legitimate" (Spaeth 2005: 276). Contrary to the more aggressive responses from the educated classes in the 1920s, Spaeth's view answered to the more leveled, less belligerent stances that would center the debate on the possibilities of jazz as a high art form. For Faulkner, this debate had been tangential; she was preoccupied with morals and the education of the young firstly, and the high art / popular culture

dichotomy was used to address and justify her position. We will delve into the boundaries between high and low art shortly; what is essential to understand through these examples, nonetheless, is that the musicological meaning of jazz was oftentimes overlooked by critics or authorities in the field of the arts to procure a naturalized, de-historicized conception of jazz as either an immoral aesthetic or a mere attitude that could only aspire to that of high art if fostered by genius white men.

There were, however, other instances in which an attempt to decipher the musicological codes were made. The eminent composer and critic Virgil Thomson attempted in the late 1930s to deconstruct the swing meter, concluding that "there is a high degree of intellectual and nervous excitement present in any swing audience" (2004: 52). Similarly, many of the first jazz enthusiasts and critics that were presented in the first part of this study, although lacking, for the most part, a formal musicological education, drew on alternative ways of interpreting the rhythmic beat that would appeal to a less denigrating description of the music. Frequently, and although these writers succumbed themselves to other forms of mystification (namely through the image of exoticism) they were able to provide more objective conclusions that refrained from offending high societal codes of conduct. Wilder Hobson, for instance, distanced himself from the more emphatic bourgeois view with eloquent remarks endorsing the possibility of there being a diversity of aroused feelings: "To some [jazz] means the whole cocktail-swilling deportment of the post-War era. To others it suggests loud and rowdy dance music" (Qtd. Gridley, Maxham, and Hoff 2004: 19). Indeed, as we will see, the general white sentiment towards jazz shifted not only with the rise of symphonic jazz, but also with the popularity of swing music. The opinions held by Faulkner or Van Dyke represent an extreme version of the bourgeois ideology, yet more subtle arguments were also prevalent, as were the writings that through formal musical aspects *celebrated* the primitivism of jazz, in the line of other advocates of modernist expression.

So far we have established some possible reasons as to why jazz, as a concept, was prone to mythical speech in its beginnings and early development. The basic ideas are that jazz signified certain categories beyond musical ones, where racial and class issues were involved, that the term „jazz' was, from the start, subjected to de-historicizing due to the overwhelming amount of theories about its etymology, and that the musicological meaning of jazz was suspended on the grounds of providing

definitions drawing on the fields of psychology, physiology, ethics, and the high art / popular culture binarism. Since the upper white elite dominated, for the most part, journalistic discourse and propaganda, theirs was the most commanding position, and they succeeded in centering the discussion on what affected them as a society and moral group.

Returning to Barthes, we are reminded that only the bourgeoisie has the privilege to utilize mythical speech, while the left is limited in its articulateness by the language of the producer-product, that is, the language of the revolution. What are we to make, then, of the early meanings of jazz given by the oppressed, that is, the African American community? More specifically, how are we to interpret the pro-jazz language of early black musicians who gloriously mouthed the meaning and the formal qualities of the aesthetic? These would start to blossom in the 1930s, and throughout the following decades reports about what jazz was from the view of black musicians would gain more respect. We have seen that musicological analysis is often suspended by the bourgeoisie, but then, in jazz, there is a notorious tradition to resist analysis. As Lewis Ported notes, "jazz musicians themselves have promoted this scepticism about analysis" (2004: 39). Porter suggests that this may be due not so much to their disbelief in formal approaching as to perhaps lacking the educational tools to do so, or even the ability to verbally transmit what they are producing through their music without language acting as a filter, for "their own behavior contradicts the belief that jazz cannot be analyzed" (L. Porter 2004: 39). Whatever the case may be, it is true that a substantial number of musicians' testimonies are engaged in a decorous form of storytelling that resemble myth-making, though with the opposite purpose to that of the white bourgeoisie. Others who did discuss formal qualities, even if minimally, would tend to follow a certain pattern. Notice for example how Jelly Roll Morton, the self-proclaimed inventor of jazz, describes the music in the transcription of his interview with Alan Lomax:

> A lot of people have a wrong conception about jazz. Somehow it got into the dictionary that jazz was considered a lot of blatant noise and discordant tones, something that would be even harmful to the ears. . . .
>
> Jazz music is to be played sweet, soft, plenty rhythm with your plenty swing, it becomes beautiful. To start with, you can't make crescendos and diminuendos when one is playing triple forte. You got to be able to come down in order to go up. If a glass of water is full, you can't fill it anymore: but if you have half a glass, you have the opportunity to put more water in it. Jazz music is based on the same principles. You have the finest ideas

> from the greatest operas, symphonies and overtures in jazz music. There is nothing finer than jazz music because it comes from everything of the finest class music. (Qtd. Lomax 1950: 64, 66)

Notice as well the way in which Duke Ellington attempts to define the music:

> What, exactly, is jazz? A matter of trick rhythms, blue-notes, and unorthodox harmonies? I think not. Those matters may enter into it, but only in the nature of the result and not the cause. To my mind, jazz is simply the expression of an age, in music . . . Just as the classic form represents strict adherence to a structural standard, just as romantic music represents rebellion against fixed forms in favor of more personal utterance, so jazz continues the pattern of barrier-breaking and emerges as the freest musical expression we have yet seen. To me, then, jazz means simply freedom of musical speech! (Qtd. M. Tucker 1993: 256)

In both instances, there is a predisposition towards liberating jazz from the bigotry and categorical thinking of bourgeois extremism. Jelly Roll Morton makes a straightforward complaint against the dictionary-like definitions that downplay the music, while Ellington, in his characteristically elegant way, goes beyond basic definitions to provide an analogy between jazz and an age. For the former, the very beauty of jazz can be found in the reason of its forms, and for the latter, form is not even enough to circumscribe the completion of its meaning. These are not the language of revolution; they are the words proper of mythical speech. Formal musical qualities are a brief pretext for Morton to approach the issue of high art, in the same way that they were for Faulkner, though with the opposite aim. For Ellington, they don't even constitute the essence of jazz (they are only part of the result); the analogy is one based between jazz and the spirit of an epoch, between jazz and individual will against the establishment, the endurance of the romantic frontiersman ethic encoded in syncopated, swinging terms.

But a Barthean revision requires us to be wary of the nature of the language of the oppressed. In order to solve the equation, Barthes provides a subcategory within the bourgeoisie itself, what he calls the avant-garde. The avant-garde (notice he refuses to use the term „proletarian') is constituted by groups of artists and intellectuals "without public other than the class which they contest, and who remain dependent on its money

in order to express themselves" (Barthes 1972: 139).[14] Their mission is to revolt against bourgeois ideology, but only by contesting their language, not their status. Biographical details in the lives of Morton and Ellington comply with the avant-garde: as businessmen, both made a living out of their music, attracting blacks and white aesthetes and liminoids to their circles. Although Ellington was an actively vocal „race man' and often spoke of race pride, his years of performance at the Cotton Club, exclusively for white audiences, were marked by heavily exotic ornamental performances of African motifs, which catered the name „jungle music.' But even if we set aside these biographical sketches and focus solely on the message delivered in these two excerpts, the apparent contradiction is reconciled by the fact that although Morton and Ellington refrain from elevating the value of the music by using the same resources that Osgood or Spaeth applied (that is, by reinstating symphonic jazz composers as the demiurges to unite the idiom and the genius), they do not opt for dismissing the categories themselves. This is the distinction that Barthes refers to when he claims that the avant-garde separates between the ethically and the politically bourgeois. The subversion is carried out at an aesthetic and ethical level; there is a desire to do justice to jazz, to secure its position, its relevance, as a high art form. Contesting opinions are refuted, either on the grounds of the formal qualities between jazz and classical pieces or on the grounds of jazz's symbolic value as the music of an era. To use the language of the revolution would have implied a linguistic destruction, a vanquishing of mythical speech through an implosion of the binarism (high art / popular culture, or classical / jazz) but neither Morton nor Ellington are willing to let go of the dichotomy. Rather, the path taken is to de-mystify by re-mystifying, to go beyond the extremist position and bring jazz to a more acceptable place, worthy of the respect of musicians and American society in general. Where Morton claims that jazz borrows from the finest aspects of classical masterpieces, Ellington claims that the music performs the same universal function that other movements have had. The game is still a bourgeois one – to define art in bourgeoisie terms without attacking the bourgeois methodology itself. There is no contestation against its political dimension, that is, against the oppressive forces deriving from the binarism. It does not mean that Morton or Ellington were oblivious to

[14] Barthes writes that "in a bourgeois culture, there is neither proletarian culture nor proletarian morality, there is no proletarian art; ideologically, all that is not bourgeoisie is obliged to *borrow* from the bourgeoisie" (1972: 139).

the racial and class hierarchies implied within the dichotomy, and much less does it mean that they approved or even accepted them. What it means is that „the status' of the bourgeoisie is "[left] aside" (Barthes 1972: 139), and that by doing so, these musicians were able to benefit from the capitalist economy on which they, as American citizens, were dependent.

If we were to extend this interpretation to other forms of jazz discourse, we could conclude that all views seeking to integrate the music as a high art form, or at least seeking to equate its value to that of classical music, are products of the bourgeois avant-garde. This position coincides with that of the greater racial issue; those endeavoring to place jazz as an American idiom tend to believe in an integrationist racial system (this does not necessarily mean a color-blind society; the proclamation of African American culture as primordially an American group with a unique set of distinctive characteristics is enough). On the other hand, those refusing to submit to Western standards of high art / popular culture and actively engaged in portraying the role of the bourgeoisie as antithetical to the interests of African American art, such as Amiri Baraka or Malcolm X, are inclined towards a separationist standpoint. In Barthes's view, it would be this latter disposition which would be preoccupied with the political plight and therefore, they would be the ones exploiting revolutionary language in absolute protest. In their dismissal of what they deem as oppressive aesthetic binarisms, they would also, incidentally, contravene mythical speech.

2.3. BOURGEOIS RHETORIC AND THE MYTH OF PRIMITIVISM

Primitivism has been a controversial topic in jazz ever since its beginnings and has been given ample attention by scholars and music critics especially throughout the surge of New Jazz Studies. Some significant contributions on the matter include Neil Leonard's *Jazz and the White Americans* (1962), Ted Gioia's *The Imperfect Art* (1988), and the anthologies *Reading Jazz* (1993), edited by David Meltzer, and *Jazz in Print* (2002), collected by Karl Koenig. As I demonstrated at the beginning of this study, primitivism has been central to the discourse surrounding jazz studies ever since the founding fathers of jazz writing (Hugues Panassié, Robert Goffin, Rudi Blesh, Charles Delauney) unambiguously articulated in their discussions the instinctual nature of the black race. Indeed, no jazz scholar can afford to ignore the highly controversial debate surrounding the myth of primitivism. In this section I examine some representative excerpts from critical white texts to exemplify Barthes's most salient rhetorical figures for mystification, in the hopes of establishing the common linguistic devices used in jazz writing to conjure sentiments of either fascination or abhorrence. Leonard's and Gioia's work has been vital for a historic reconstruction of the context within which early jazz performances were received, but there remain fundamental crevices from which to analyze the chief structural and thematic patterns of these poignant critiques. The objective, therefore, is to identify and classify the discursive tendencies applied by early anti-jazz and pro-jazz advocates to trace the pervading bourgeois ideology colonizing (and silencing) the history of the music (the process of depoliticizing and de-historicizing). Whether consciously or not, the primitivist myth, that is, the speech that naturalizes jazz as the untainted product of savagery, or, in its milder form, of instinct and intuition, was an effective, manipulative operation that ultimately led to the act of dispossession. In this context, by dispossession I do not mean the latter proclivities towards establishing jazz as a multi-cultural (versus African American) aesthetic in which whites' role was instrumental; what I mean is the dispossessing, the depriving of an explicative, causal history in connection with the black race's artistic expression. White jazz critics deformed the relationship between the musician and his or her instrument, and by extension, between the agent and the significance of the idiom. Jazz as a signifier signified negritude, and negritude in itself was a conglomeration of stereotypes and images soaked in exoticism and static atavisms.

2.3.1. The Primitive 'Other'

In postcolonial ethics, there has been consistent emphasis on the perception of race as a cultural (versus biological) concept. Anna Stubblefield claims that although it is a biological reality, "our lived experience of race is how it has been constructed socially" (2005: 113). This argument often results in the premise that race is a myth (in the sense of 'unreal' or 'falsehood'), an analogy that Stubblefield does not find helpful, but that nonetheless has bore significant weight since the 1940s. In the height of Nazism, Ashley Montagu labeled race as the "witchcraft, the demonology of our time, the means by which we exorcise imagined demoniacal powers among us" (1997: 41). Although more than half a century separates these two views, both Montagu and Stubblefield are quick to point out that the concept of race does not signify a biological fact, but that there is an evident ideological filter that prevents race from signifying merely upon the diversity of the human species. Montagu explains the process by which race is sentenced to distortion:

> The myth of 'race' refers not to the fact that physically distinguishable populations of man exist. Such populations are often called races. Distinctive populations of this kind are not myths, but neither are they races in the sense in which the term is usually employed. That sense is the myth, the myth of 'race,' the belief that physical differences are associated with rather pronounced differences in mental capacities, and that these differences are measurable by IQ tests and the cultural achievements of these populations. (1997: 44)

Like slavery, Nazism and the holocaust brought race to the center of ethical considerations, but as a Eurocentric social construct it had been developing for centuries. The process of molding and defining race is none other than the process by which white supremacy establishes and limits its relationship to otherness, that is, the process of 'othering.' Indeed, the advent of modern fascination with primitiveness can be traced as far back as Darwin's *The Origin of Species By Means of Natural Selection* (1859) and *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871). Darwin postulated the propagation and survival of the fittest within the inevitability of evolution, suggesting along the way the ancestral bonds between man and animal. Nature was organically active, not static, cyclically repeating itself with no other purpose than to perfect the possibility of the survival of certain species. History and

tradition, therefore, were nothing less than an illusion of rationalism; the narrative of the past did not delineate a single line towards progression but intermittently mapped a circle where beginning and end overlapped. If there was any promise of progress, it was to be attributed to natural forces, not to rationalism or spiritual zeal. Perfection of the species was based quantitatively on the preciseness and skill with which the group adapted to the environment, no longer on the Cartesian separation between soul and matter or the biblical justification to manipulate and transform nature to one's will. Fin-de-siècle literature apocalyptically fantasized about the dystopian horrors of evolution (H.G. Wells) and about the otherness slumbering within (Robert Louis Stevenson). During the prime of Modernism, race spawned as an aesthetic motif. The avant-gardes' experimentation with form and content in an effort to reproduce subjectivity and the absurd, tragic, or nihilist connections between man and history found in African and aboriginal Australian art the necessary symbol to address the futility of progress. In this vortex of creative output, jazz emerged as the quintessential music of man's primitive past, an anachronism signifying the cyclic, spatial nature of time (as opposed to Western linearity) where purity and innocence contested the atrophied sense of the self weighing heavily over man's and humanity's shoulders. In the same way that race was experienced as a social construct, so did jazz, as a signifier of race, bear the association with certain mental capacities and instinctive urges.

Ted Gioia (1988) has pointed out that Delauney and Goffin were highly influenced by Apollinaire, one of the aesthetic forbearers of modern primitivism, and his vision permeated their writing. Apollinaire was responsible for the cubist manifesto "On Painting" (1913), where the aims and motives behind the movement were collected. Among other things, he divided cubism into four distinct forms of expression: scientific cubism, physical cubism, orphic cubism, and instinctive cubism. It is in this last category where primitivist inspiration becomes more evident: "Instinctive cubism is the art of painting new compositions taken not from reality as it is seen, but as it is suggested to the artist by instinct and intuition . . . Instinctive artists lack lucidity and an artistic creed" (Apollinaire 2004: 26), he wrote. This unmediated automatism between the instinctual and the artistic product could be used as either a reason to condemn or to admire jazz. For these early pro-jazz writers, the relationship between musician and instrument was based on a certain state of trance in which the player, unable to control his deepest impulses, reached an otherworldly, or more precisely, „inworldly,' state of

mind. He became fused with the instrument, imploding all its soundscaping possibilities through his own physical expression, oblivious to social etiquette and moderate containment of sentiment. One of Goffin's most celebrated passages describing this effect is his portrayal of Louis Armstrong: "Louis possesses the great gift which permits him almost automatically to enter into a trance and then to express his sensibility by means of his instrument" (Qtd. Gioia 1988: 30). Goffin later adds that "I know of no white musician who is able to forget himself, to create his own atmosphere, and to whip himself up into a state of complete frenzy" (Qtd. Gioia 1988: 30). I do not intend to repeat the same ideas that have been presented in the beginning of this dissertation, and which the reader is free to review, but it is important to stress the fact that the strategical devices employed by the first jazz critics answer to the wider quixotic endeavor of the avant-gardes to place primitiveness at the forefront of aesthetic discussion.

Surely the hyperbolic sexualization and animalization of blacks had been prevalent in the white supremacist discourse long before Darwin and before the avant-gardes; sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth-century accounts of the middle passage attest to the institutionalization of these perceptions through slavery. But Darwinism provided a new prism that white Western culture could no longer negate, at least scientifically. In order to rescind evolutionism, distance had to be marked discursively and socially; the high art / folk culture antinomy constituted the artillery to combat allegations on racial similitude and to taxonomically refute the existence of that otherness within. For white supremacists, otherness needed to remain without, and it needed to retain its symbolic and connotative qualities for them to identify and not acknowledge within themselves. Race, in other words, was a vibrant mythical construct aiming to eternalize and personify otherness, and jazz, that music that attracted the white rebellious youth was to be irreparably stigmatized with primitivism. At the same time, avant-garde artists were prone to consecrate the intricacies of this supposed unison of humanity through races, hence propelling the music as the symbol of historical genesis, present, and futurism. In David Meltzer's words, "jazz has been celebrated and damned for the same reasons: for possessing the body, for restoring a person momentarily to a state of noble and innocent savagery, for inflaming sexual jungle fantasies, [and] for being the absolute acme of all that's new and modern" (1993: 21-22).

Concomitant to the avant-gardes was the modernist wave of anthropology. In the late 1910s and 1920s, the prioritization of the study of ritual in ethnography was in its height with the works of Sir James Frazer (his abridged version of *The Golden Bough* was published in 1922), Franz Boas, whose extensive career resulted in multiple significant studies such as *The Mind of Primitive Man* (1911) and *Primitive Art* (1927), Lucien Lévy-Bruhl's *Primitive Mentality* (1922) and *The Soul of the Primitive* (1927), and Bronislaw Malinowski's "Magic, Science and Religion" (1925) and "Myth in Primitive Psychology" (1926).[15] Theoretical and conclusive differences aside, these

[15] The myth and ritual theory contends that there is a behavioral alliance connecting creed and ritual. From the late nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth century, myth-ritualists have articulated several speculations regarding the nature of this connection. While the general principle of the school seems to be that myth and ritual must operate together, or that at least originally this was the norm, the debate has mostly been centered on which elements precedes which, what psychosocial function does the ritual aim to sustain, and whether there is the possibility that myths and rituals can originate independently and later consolidate as a single unit of social order. According to Robert Segal (2004), the precursor of the theory was William Robertson Smith. Smith turned from his epoch's tendency to approach religion from the side of belief, opting instead to study religion from its ritualistic, practical form. His main conclusions revolved around the idea that ritual was prior to myth, which was only of secondary importance, and that myth eventually developed as the explanatory tool of the ritual. Segal points out that "in claiming that myth is an explanation of the ritual, Smith is denying that myth is an explanation of the world – the standard conception of myth, espoused classically by Edward B. Tylor" (2004: 3). Smith's *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* highly influenced Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, which first appeared in 1890 and would be expanded to a total of up to twelve volumes in subsequent editions, until the abridged version appeared in 1922. Frazer stands as the official founder of twentieth-century ritualist theory; his recording of countless universal rituals adhering to the cult of vegetation resulted in his division of cultures into three main stages: that of magic, that of religion, and that of science. The first stage, which in a way contravened Tylor's animistic theory, was based on the active and sympathetic nature of homeopathic (or imitative) and contagious magic. Following Smith and Victorian imperialist values, Frazer deemed these practices as the output of primitive man's ignorance and simplicity. Both forms of magic stem from obsolete inscience: "Homeopathic magic commits the mistake of assuming that things which resemble each other are the same," and "contagious magic commits the mistake of assuming that things which have once been in contact with each other are always in contact (Frazer 1935: 12). Like Smith, Frazer continued to prioritize ritual over myth, but he went beyond Tylor's and Smith's theories in that the connections between myth and ritual involved in the first two stages were a means not only to explain, but to control the world. The third stage, on the

scholars sought to establish the relationship between mythologies (in the sense of a collection of narratives, usually of an oral character), and ritualistic enactments of them, either through magic, through practices based on animistic and totemic principles, or through customs based on taboo. As the examinations of ritual became a leading approach to negotiate Western man's relationship and connection to the „other,' white writers adorned their conjectures with summons of wild West African rites, Congo Square dance routines to the polyrhythm of the drums, or collective customs held in the

---

other hand, represents the culture's overcoming of primitiveness, where science replaces myth and ritual in their controlling of the world.

The Golden Bough paved the way for the work of classical mythologist Jane Harrison and for comparative-religion scholar Samuel Henry Hooke, who deviated from Frazer in their absorption of the first two stages into a single period of human civilization, and for the American-German anthropologist Franz Boas, and the Polish ethnographer Malinowski, among many other names. The universality of the myth-ritualist theory propounded by Frazer is reduced to more specific case studies. Boas focused on Baffin Island and subsequently on Native American culture in the American Northwest, and would inspire Zora Neale Hurston for her extensive collection on Southern Negro culture, which resulted in the celebrated *Mules and Men* (1935). Malinowski's paradigmatic discoveries in the Trobriand Islands brought him to the conclusion that rituals had the function of ordering and justifying the group's social organization. Rituals, in other words, were tools to ensure the systematic arrangements of social labor, where every individual served his or her function in accordance with the necessity of the group. Primitive mythologies, therefore, could not be studied "from what they [looked] like on paper" (Malinowski 1955: 110), but from their pragmatic, organic contribution to the subsistence of tribal life, and the most transparent way of doing so was by exploring and examining the dialectics within rituals.

We must keep in mind that jazz emerges at a time when the research of these scholars pushes the prominence of ritual in the discipline of mythography to its climax. Adding to the impact of psychoanalysis and the belief in the primitive, instinctive urges constrained within the subject's unconscious and manifested symbolically through dreams, the myth and ritual theory was a deterministic screen through which white cultivated circles approached jazz. As awed viewers harked to the estranging and bewildering music before them, they envisioned associations with African rituals, of which jazz was a vivid residue. Imaginative evocations of the magical aims of the dances were common, and increased the horror or fascination of the audience. The paternalistic prism that had permeated Frazer's work and continued, although more mildly, in Malinowski's research, found its way into the discussion of jazz rituals as well, establishing a racial condescendence based on the inscience and simplicity of ritualistic dancing to African drums.

slave plantations of the South. [16] A jazz or a blues performance was sure to evoke these settings in the minds of whites within earshot.

Formalistic arrangements and the content of the music could equally be subjected to highbrow and avant-garde understandings of primitiveness. In terms of form, soundscapes of the Negro past were reproduced in the blues: from the call-response patterns of the field hollers and spirituals to the inflexions, whoops, cries, howls, and shouts that had awed and mesmerized slave owners throughout the last centuries, these practices peppered the recordings of race records. Embellishments also included onomatopoeic sounds reminiscent of the rural environment of the South: from imitations of screech owls, whose distinct cry was traditionally interpreted by slaves as an omen of death, to rhythmic reproductions of kinesthetic exhaling used to maintain the beat in work songs, and sometimes evocative howls of the hounds released to hunt down the runaway slave. These stylistic devices were viewed as metonymical remains of ritual customs of the black culture of the antebellum South.

In terms of content, primitive and classical blues lyrics were filled with behavioral attitudes unmediated by reason, morality, or even common sense. Lyrics on jealousy, beatings, whippings, murder, and unfaithfulness represented the dark side of

[16] During the late eighteenth-century Spanish and French occupation of the Louisiana Territory, New Orleans slaves were given permission to gather on Sundays in public squares for dancing. The law, which was passed in 1786, suffered a few restrictive modifications some years after the United States' purchase of Louisiana (1804). In 1817 new stipulations limited the time and space of these Sunday festivities: dancing after sunset was prohibited, and Congo Square (also called Place Congo and Circus Square) was established as the only legal location to carry them out, always under the vigilance of the police authorities. Accounts of these dances and ring shouts were collected by the architect Benjamin Henry Latrobe, who declared that he had "never seen anything more brutally savage, and at the same time dull and stupid" (Qtd. White and White 2005: XII). Other accounts were given by Robert Farris Thompson and James R. Creecy, but as Congo Square festivities declined in the following decades, recordings became scanter. Sandke (2010) has recently brought evidence to suggest that the eyewitness descriptions given by George Washington Cable and Lafcadio Hearn in the 1880s are alarmingly unreliable, and that they distort contemporary jazz scholars' image of Congo Square musical routines. Reliable or not, and in spite of the pending sense of revulsion that most of these writers felt, these portrayals have survived as proof to nurture jazz creation myths, which proclaim Congo Square as the American setting where the resplendence and creativity of the dispossessed would begin to mold itself into the jazz and the blues idioms.

love and sex. The moans and groans accompanying the lyrical plot produced dramatizing effects that recalled the imitative and homeopathic features of rituals described by ethnographers, whereupon a feeling was magically exorcised or controlled through a socially established physical enactment that signified upon the moment of crisis. Other times, the singer could praise his or her lover and boast publicly about the sexual and emotional fulfillment he or she felt. Sexual metaphors referring to genitalia, prowess, and to how one's partner performs in bed were a commonality within the blues discourse, and they were enriched by borrowing terms from other semantic fields to expand the allegory. Vocabulary based on food, animals, or the automobile was frequently exploited, and its connotations were not lost on the white race-record collectors. The thematic content was deemed as primitive in itself for its presentation of bestial human urges, from roaring sexual cravings to the physical pain of hunger, from the desolation of poverty to murderous and suicidal resolutions. Rather than interpreting these features from a contextual point of intersection where the collectivity can retain its historical identity, the tendency of whites seemed to be of an additive structure. These components, whether appealing to ritual, to an instinct unmediated by reason, or to a mirror of humanity past, appeared enumerated, counted one on top of the other as if searching for a quantitative result that might explain the qualitative elements of the aesthetic. Categories of identity do not meet at a junction, and therefore they cannot accurately respond to a causal history.

2.3.2. Rhetorical Devices

With this circumstantial atmosphere where primitiveness was regarded as central to the humanities and sciences, let us consider the prime rhetorical figures functioning in white jazz writing from the beginning of the twentieth century to the mid-1940s, just before bebop emerged as the movement that would truly establish jazz within the high art frame. Barthes does not prioritize the importance of any of these figures; rather, they tend to appear distributed throughout the average bourgeois discourse. Barthes tentatively distinguishes seven categories: inoculation, privation of history, identification, tautology, neither-norism, quantification of quality, and statement of fact. The reader will soon find that these devices easily overlap, and that more than one

figure can often be distinguished within certain statements or fragments of the selected texts. For this reason, it should be kept in mind that no rhetorical method prevails over any of the others, and that they should be viewed as a matrix of operative forms of mythical speech.

To better introduce the reader within these mystifying forms, we shall begin by pointing out how race and jazz are inextricably linked in early white jazz writing. The problem can be understood as one of tautologies and statements of fact, which are two of the most similar rhetorical devices used by the bourgeoisie. Tautology "consists in defining like by like" and "takes refuge behind the argument of authority" (Barthes 1972: 153). They relate to statements of fact in that they acquire the status of a maxim; while tautologies avoid explanation precisely because they are built on the illusion of a rationality that is in fact absent, statements of fact rest upon the foundation of common sense. Given the multiple mystified layers functioning within the social construct of the black race, allegations of savagery, brutishness, and nobility can practically be understood at a tautological level of repetitive equivalences. The implication is that „blackness is savagery' and „savagery is blackness'; „white taste is intellectually justified' and „intellect exemplifies white virtue'; „Negroes are instinctive' and „instinct is the prime character of the Negro race,' etc. The resulting discursive texture is one sustained on the grounds of the longevity of such beliefs. These claims strengthen the pillars of a set of shared values reinforced by tradition; tautologies and statements of fact elude counterarguments because it is in their nature to suggest that it would be nonsensical and unreasonable to question their enunciation. Not only do questions cease to be asked, but more importantly, the moral claim contained within the tautology or the statement does not induce to challenge. Linguistically and morally, the claim becomes apothegmatic, of a pseudo-proverbial quality. George Fredrickson lists a series of common-held assumptions about the black race that were prevalent from the 1830s until practically the surge of the Civil Rights Movement:

> 1. Blacks are physically, intellectually, and temperamentally *different* from whites.
> 2. Blacks are also *inferior* to whites in at least some of the fundamental qualities wherein the races differ, especially in intelligence . . .
> 5. Racial prejudice and antipathy is a natural and inevitable response to blacks . . .

> 6. A biracial equalitarian (or „integrated') society is either completely impossible, now and forever, or can be achieved in some remote and almost inconceivable future. For all practical purposes the destiny of the blacks in America is either continued subordination – slavery or some form of caste discrimination – or their elimination as an element of the population. (1987: 321)

As will soon become clear, most of the following rhetorical figures can be reduced to the principles of these maxims, whereupon the black / white value dualism can always find its ultimate justification. The omnipresent authorial voice belongs to that of white cultivated society, the most emblematic conserver of traditionalism.

Let us now view the figure of inoculation, which consists in "admitting the accidental evil of a class-bound institution the better to conceal its principal evil" (Barthes 1972: 150). Functioning as a sort of linguistic red herring that can better conceal the politics of the bourgeoisie, this device appears all the more prevalent in texts arousing the noble savage, sambo-like image. Panassié was especially fond of presenting the oppressive conditions under which the jazz spirit was crystallized:

> A glance at the conditions under which jazz was born will help to explain this phenomenon. As a consequence to the ostracism to which, in the United States, the whites had subjected the colored people, the Negroes lived apart, among themselves, and did not participate in the prevailing cultural stream, but formed a primitive intellectual society of their own. The music which flowed from such a social grouping could not fail to present the characteristics of primitive music.
>
> One of the most striking characteristics of primitive music is the absence of the line of demarcation between creation and execution, such as distinguishes European music of the twentieth century. In the beginning, before written music had been invented, a man seeking expression would sing or play what was on his mind. Creation and interpretation were as closely united as possible – were really one; the distinction between conception and interpretation with no direct connection was then unknown. (Panassié 2005: 8)

For Panassié, there is no autonomy on the part of the Negro race if not in reactionary terms. He proclaims the marginalization of blacks as the origin of a ritualistic shaping, rightly accusing slaveocracy but developing a narrative where the oppressed has only very rudimentary tools from which to aesthetically express his situation. The immediacy between creation and interpretation suggests that the race had no other way of conceptualizing the social constrictions to which it was subjected other than the

spontaneous transmission of his deeper anxieties. There is no rational process that may suggest that the collectivity was self-conscious about its art and that from very early on, there might have been a theoretical background to the music that was progressively being refined and perfected. This child-like stage of an aesthetic cannot help but reflect an infantile state of mind on the part of the creators. Almost twenty years before Panassié published these statements, Gilbert Seldes presented in "Tojours Jazz" (1924) a similar appreciation of the unsophisticated creative method of blacks: "The negroes have given their response to the world with an exceptional naïveté, a directness of expression which has interested *our* minds as well as touched our emotions;" he wrote, "they have shown comparatively little evidence of the functioning of *their* intelligence" (Seldes 2004: 137). For Seldes, this was a setback that prevented him from truly accepting the idiom as an art, as much as he might have felt drawn to its exotic features. Spontaneity of expression, seductive as it was for the curious observer, did not answer to the standards of a qualified art form. In another passage he draws on the binarism to ratify the heterogeneity of the forms:

> I say the negro is not our salvation because with all my feeling for what he instinctively offers, for his desirable indifference to our set of conventions about emotional decency, I am on the side of civilization. To anyone who inherits several thousand centuries of civilization, none of the things the negro offers can matter unless they are apprehended by the mind as well as by the body and the spirit. (Seldes 2004: 136)

For Seldes, as for Osgood, jazz required the intellectualization and refinement that only a white musician could offer. Hence his later remark that Paul Whiteman was the savior of the idiom, and that he, along with other symphonic jazz composers and arrangers, could elevate the music to the standards of cultivated taste. Seldes suggests that despite its rootedness in the tragedy of peoples – "I have heard it said by those who have suffered much that [jazz] is the only native music worth listening to in America" (Seldes 2004: 135) – the origin of the music does little to enhance its high art appeal, unless salvaged by the intellect of the white, civilized man.

The viral demeanor of inoculation is that the acquiescence of an accidental evil (in this case slavery and segregation) remains a mere illusion. Oppression is presented matter-of-factly, with the purpose of shedding light on the origins of the music. Slavery and marginalization are unavoidable topics when addressing African American

aesthetics, but the writers may mask their treatment of it in many ways. The barbarism and atrocities inherent to a white supremacist social structure remain absent, as does the oppressor's moral decay resulting from such a system. Brutishness and savageness are still retained within the identity of the „other,' and the best that the Negro can do to subdue such instincts is to become a noble, as opposed to a vicious, creature.

This brings us to the acknowledgement of another accidental evil, which is the alleged corruption of morality through the machine and modern exploitative systems of the working class, the basis of capitalist dynamics. This evil, capital to the avant-gardes' retrogressive understanding of progress, launches the Rousseau-like noble savage into the context of the urban jungle. Oblivious to the perversion of politics and economy, the Negro in this way can be deemed as an image "[to immunize] the contents of the collective imagination by means of a small inoculation of the acknowledged evil" (Barthes 1972: 150). A very common depiction of the musician as a noble savage was one expressed by Ernest Ansermet in 1919, where again there is a failure to produce an image in which the black individual can appear as a rational human being:

> The blues occurs when the Negro is sad, when he is far from his mammy, or his sweetheart. Then, he thinks of a preferred rhythm, and takes his trombone, or his violin, or his banjo, or his clarinet, or his drum, or else he sings, or simply dances. And on the chosen motif, he plumbs the depths of his imagination. This makes his sadness pass away – it is the blues. (Ansermet 2004: 371)

The blues idiom, which would be propelled by Ralph Ellison and Albert Murray years later as an active contestation containing the same motifs that classical myths, Hemingway or Eliot expounded, appears here as the wailing of a creature that can neither master his destiny nor control his emotions, but can only faithfully reproduce the simple passions of his desires. The blues do not subdue the tragic sentiment; they are presented as a mere passive channel that will cheer the happy-go-lucky Negro up through the playful distraction of music. This diamond-in-the-rough stereotype was also to nostalgically attract the bourgeoisie for its symbolism of a lost era of purity, before the monstrous anxieties of the modern age drained the individual from the more essential matters of life. This damaged descendant of the noble savage appeared as a psychologically maimed figure, the quintessential victim of the evils of modernity. In 1934 Constant Lambert lamented that "in point of fact, jazz has long ago lost the simple

gaiety and sadness of the charming savages to whom it owes its birth, and is now for the most part a reflection of the jagged nerves, sex repressions, inferiority complexes and general dreariness of the modern scene" (1993: 109). Lambert further acknowledged the noble savage's aesthetic role as a commodity for white audiences: "The Negro associations of jazz, the weary traveler, the comforting old mammy, the red-hot baby, have become a formula of expression only, as empty and convenient as the harlequin and the columbine of the nineteenth century" (1993: 109).

The method of inoculation results in the deprivation of history; black music is simplified to such an extent that there remains no room for the deeper narrative of the African American past. What inoculation offers in return for its concession of accidental evils is a series of petrified images in which the need for an accurate history is annulled. Whether motivated by fascination or by revulsion, the black musician tended to appear in writing dominated by some savage instinct, frozen by its inability to become civilized, prostrated by the boundaries between the mainstream and the marginal. Nathaniel Mackey calls this taxonomical process the transition from „verb' to „noun," where the latter stage represents the moment that the black race and its music become a white commodity:

> „From verb to noun' means, on the aesthetic level, a less dynamic, less improvisatory, less blues-inflected music and, on the political level, a containment of the economic and social advances that might accrue to black artistic innovation. The domain of action and the ability to suggest by *verb* is closed off by the hypostasis, paralysis, and arrest suggested by *noun.* (1995: 77)

The transformation, therefore, consists in a process whereupon the objectified subject is denied any form of agency. Like a museum piece, the black musician retains all of his beauty or all of his ugliness in its fullest splendor. The irony lies in that despite the fact that jazz is a highly corporeal expression with a swinging, rhythmic drive forward, and that, as a music, its structure is a defying challenge to standard perceptions of time, movement is insulated within the rigid walls of the noun. Indeed, as we will shortly see, it is practically the standard in early white writing of jazz to describe the hectic rush of musicians, often through spasms, provocative dances, and vertiginous leaps from low to screeching tones, but these movements are neither associated with the perfection of a tradition, nor with an artist's abilities to expose and reflect the intellect. Rather, they

become eternalized through isolation from their proper history: every act of agency is conceived only in relation to what it means and how it relates to the white bourgeoisie. The function of jazz is no longer indebted to its own cultural past; jazz becomes a symbol of white perception of the black race, where motionlessness is necessary to capture its significance within the modern Western world.

The transition from verb to noun deeply resembles the Barthean rhetoric devices of privation of history and identification. The first is summarized by Barthes as the method by which "myth deprives the object of which it speaks of all History" (1972: 151). The very act of inoculation through an evocation of slavery and segregation, because of the simplicity and distortion of its causal effects, is a gesture to the evaporation of history. "All that is left for one to do is to enjoy this beautiful object without wondering where it comes from" (1972: 151), Barthes claims. The simple narrative of the disheartened, yet merry black individual suffices for the white observer's interest. When writers were inspired to let their imagination loose, they mustered other faraway lands of exotic rituals that were just as petrified and de-historicized as the black individual. George Antheil, for example, fathomed in 1934 that "the Negro music, like the Negro, has been living for a number of million years under terrible heat; Negro music has, in consequence, been baked as hard and as beautiful as a diamond" (2004: 391). It is this superficial search for a setting with which to associate the object that Barthes christens as the rhetoric of identification. According to Barthes, "the petit-bourgeois man is unable to imagine the Other," who is "a scandal which threatens his existence" (1972: 151). The strategy through which the bourgeoisie learns to deal with the ‚other' and to know what to make of him is to paralyze him within the context that he knows, the place he has an image of, distorted as it may be:

> How can one assimilate the Negro, the Russian? There is a figure for emergencies: exoticism. The Other becomes a pure object, a spectacle, a clown. Relegated to the confines of humanity, he no longer threatens the security of the home. The figure is chiefly petit-bourgeois. For, even if he is unable to experience the Other in himself, the bourgeois can at least imagine the place where he fits in. (Barthes 1972: 152)

From early receptions of ragtime, the place where the Negro fit in was very clear to white listeners. A writer for *The Musical Courier* wrote in 1900 that the aesthetic "in its wildness and savage exultation reeks of the forests of equatorial Africa" (Anonym.

2002: 61). More than fifteen years later, a tantalized Ivan Goll communicated his astonishment after witnessing the *Revue Nègre* in Berlin as follows:

> Negroes dance with their senses. (While Europeans can only dance with their minds.) They dance with their legs, breasts, and bellies. This was the dance of the Egyptians, the whole of antiquity, the Orient. This is the dance of the Negroes. One can only envy them, for this is life, sun, primeval forests, the singing birds and the roar of a leopard, earth. They never dance naked: and yet, how naked is the dance! They have put on clothes only to show that clothes do not exist for them. (2004: 379)

Another critic, Paul Achard, summarized the *Revue Nègre* as a cluster of scenes from "stories of missionaries and travelers," "the Sudan," and "plantation landscapes" natural to "the Negro soul with its animal energies." These images were what was left of "the sad bygone time of slavery" (Qtd. Kear 1996: 52, 53). Starring the alluring Josephine Baker, who from St. Louis and New York's Plantation Club had brought the Charleston, the Black Bottom, the Mess Around, and the Shimmy to Paris in 1925, the *Revue Nègre* shocked European audiences with its African motifs. For Goll and for Archard, the dances held onstage represented the ritualistic link between the race and the land. Dance was conceived as a practice by which Negroes expressed their rootedness to the wild in physical terms, and Baker's flawless rhythmic stomping, her frequently naked breasts and her (in)famous banana skirt embodied the remnants of these remote rites best. André Levinson reportedly described her as "an extraordinary creature of simian suppleness" and a "magnificent animality" (Qtd. Kraut 2003: 438). It was not only the stage props and the performers' visibly phallic costumes, but the dances themselves what perplexed the white public so much. Panassié argued that a clear characteristic of primitive music was that it was developed with the object of dancing for its ritualistic connotations (2005: 27). An anonymous writer for the *Literary Digest* claimed in 1917 that "the group that play for dancing, when colored, seem infected with the virus that they try to instill as a stimulus in others" (2002: 119).

Dancing particularly encouraged the white bourgeoisie to make allegations on involution. The notion of degeneracy had made significant impact in Western culture through Max Nordau's *Degeneration* (1895), which predicted the end of civilization in the hands of naturalism and the decadent values of the aesthetes. The term indicated the transgression and subversion of the status quo by way of the perverse attitudes of the

newer generations and non-European societies. Fear was especially aroused regarding sex, sodomy, and masturbation, and to indulge in such acts, particularly through interracial intercourse, would condemn civilization to reversion. Aversion to degeneracy, intermingled with Darwinism, was still a vital matter throughout the first decades of the twentieth century and inevitably germinated within the jazz discourse. In 1928, Maxim Gorky wrote for *Pravda* an article titled "On the Music of the Gross" in which he describes the disturbing images suggested to him by a radio transmission of a jazz performance: "This insulting chaos of insanity pulses to a throbbing rhythm;" he exhorts, "listening for a few minutes to these wails, one involuntarily imagines an orchestra of sexually-driven madmen conducted by a man-stallion brandishing a huge genital member" (1993: 111). Less repelled but no less bewildered, Ansermet states that the performers of a negro orchestra "are so entirely possessed by the music they play that they can't stop themselves from dancing inwardly," giving the impression "as if a great wind is passing over a forest or as if a door is suddenly opened on a wild orgy" (2004: 370). Antheil suggests that the novelty may lie on the fact that the American Negro's music "rhythmically . . . comes from the groins, the hips, and the sexual organs, and not from . . . the breast, the brain, the ears and eyes of the white races" (2004: 391). The type of dancing that jazz incited was a provocation inciting man's lowest, most carnal instincts. Neil Leonard writes that a certain American biologist admonished that "better extinction than a decline to a savage past. Jazz is a signboard on the road that was travelled by Greece and Rome. Orgies of lewd dancing preceded the downfall of those nations" (1962: 39). The hypersexualized, ritualistic components of jazz were reason enough to exclude it from the pantheon of high arts.

This brings us to yet another rhetorical device which Barthes calls neither-norism, and which consists in "stating two opposites and balancing the one by the other so as to reject them both" (1972: 153). White anti-jazz advocates especially favored neither-norism when constructing a case against the consideration of the music as an art. Unable to find any novelty in the idiom, H.L. Mencken, for instance, was intrigued by the contagiousness of the jazz craze. In 1934 he wrote in *The Baltimore Evening Sun* the following:

> There is something in [jazz]. But what, precisely? I can find nothing in what is currently offered. Its melodies all run to a pattern, and that pattern is crude and childish. Its rhythms are almost as bad; what is amusing in them

> is as old as Johan Sebastian Bach, and what is new is simply an elephantine hop, skip, and jump. Nor is there anything charming in jazz harmony, once it has been heard a couple of times. (Mencken 1995: 416).

Mencken places his two basic opposites, the traditional and the innovative, none of which the idiom is able to satisfy. In order to qualify as a legitimate art form, the aesthetic at hand must mirror the causal and continuous relationship between the old and the new, which can be deciphered through a close inspection of the analogical shifts. In other words, there must remain a likeness between the past and the modern, a likeness which may either be based on similarity or on reactionary forms of expression; either way the analogy remains because it reveals the causal order between past and present forms in such a way that the basic structure, that is, the accepted canon, follows a rigorous, rational development. In neither-norism, scales are essential; they are necessary instruments through which "reality is first reduced to analogues" and then "it is weighed" (Barthes 1972: 153). Mencken weighs jazz on the scale, where one end measures tradition and the other modernization. The result is a presentation of jazz as an amateurish inversion of these categories: where there should be inventiveness there is only a coarse imitation of classical standards; what jazz supplies to modern expression, furthermore, is an infantilizing of what had taken centuries of musical evolution to perfect. The "hop, skip, and jump" is, in a way, an insult not only to the past, but to the taste for aesthetic appreciation that any given slightly cultivated individual is bound to have. The merging of childishness, animalization, and aesthetic miscegenation does not seem accidental: Mencken meticulously chooses the term „elephantine,' which initially refers to the clumsy stomping of elephants, a symbol of Africa in itself, and could also suggest the original lands of the music through its evocation of Elephantine Island, in the Southeast of Egypt. Mencken's insidious allusion to African motifs does not result in exotic seductiveness, as was the case of many other writers, but circles around the pervading notion of puerile crudeness. In the end, there is nothing about the basic measurable parameters (melody, rhythm, harmony) which dignifies jazz; none of these criterions can adequately function within the imaginary scale because of their subversion of the very considerations that render the weighing worthwhile. Barthes claims that this is the natural culmination of the neither-nor technique; in the end, by way of this "magical behavior," "both parties are dismissed because it is embarrassing to choose between them" (Barthes 1972: 153). Jazz loses all its arguments to make a

case for itself: it is neither traditional nor modernistic, and hence it is inapt for becoming a high art.

Mencken's cunning declamation, published only a year before swing officially revolutionized the music marketing industry, echoed more overt usages of neither-norisms that had marked white jazz writing for a decade. In 1925, Cecil Austin claimed that "the hall mark of all great art is its honesty and sincerity. But jazz is neither ideal nor pure, neither is it sincere. It is faithful to nothing, an „art' without parents and without relations" (2004: 147). That jazz was an orphan of the arts was also the argument made by Clive Bell, who, like Mencken, played with the idea of the music as a childish expression. In 1921 he published the well-known essay "Plus de Jazz!" in *New Republic*, where he wrongfully predicted the decline of the idiom, and where he described its features as follows:

> Impudence is its essence – impudence in quite natural and legitimate revolt against Nobility and Beauty. . . . Its fears and dislikes – for instance its horror of the Noble and the Beautiful – are childish; and so is its way of expressing them. Not by irony and sarcasm, but by jeers and grimaces does Jazz mark its antipathies. Irony and wit are for the grown-ups. Jazz dislikes them as much as it dislikes Nobility and Beauty. They are products of the cultivated intellect, and Jazz cannot away with intellect or culture. Niggers can be admired artists without any gift more singular than high spirits; so why drag in the intellect? (Bell 2001: 41)

The opposites are again manifest: neither does jazz have the nobility and beauty characteristic of the arts nor the irony and wit that mark the turning point towards a new respectable period in the evolution of any aesthetic. The scales adopt a more visible presence through the use of comparatives of equality ("as much . . . as"), where grammatical imperatives naturally seek a balance. In the end, the scale is again dismissed not because of its inability to measure in accordance with other standards, in which case the rhetorical figure would cease to perform its bourgeois function, but because the very material that is being weighed is faulty. Hereon, the agent of mythical speech embraces the actual intentionality of the figure, for "one not only needs to choose, but only to endorse" (Barthes 1972: 153). Furthermore, jazz responds in "horror" and with "jeers and grimaces" to the previously mentioned Western standards, adding, in Bell's view, insult to injury. These words revolve around the overall notion of impudence, projecting an image of the highest insolence and impulsiveness that are

idiosyncratic of the social construct of blacks. Unlike Mencken's more suggestive case, the opposites here also become overtly racialized, and the tautologies and statements of fact between whiteness and intellect and blackness and simplicity (which equates, as we have seen, to either vicious or noble savageness) become transparent.

The imaginary motif of the scale is helpful to comprehend the final rhetorical figure, which Barthes calls the quantification of quality, and which is latent in practically all the other mystifying methods. I mentioned in the beginning of this analysis that the rhetorical figures tend to overlap, and that tautologies and statements of fact could be identified within the other devices when considering the stereotypical images that race constructs involve. As Barthes asserts, all the figures can be fundamentally reduced to the categories of "the Essences and Scales" (1972: 155), with the overall aim of deliberately depriving the mystified concept or object from its history and presenting a naturalized, apparently eternal image as surrogate. I also mentioned that white writers tended to represent jazz through additive structures where the music's features where successively enumerated without reference to a tangential point of intersection in which categories could more successfully provide a faithful construct of black art, and by extension, black identity. This additive tendency is crucial to comprehend Mackey's description of the paralysis of the black musician as a noun, through which he becomes a mere conglomeration of bourgeois values and stereotypes. The quantification of quality answers, on the one hand, to this strategy: as the construct of the Negro race is reduced to a series of maxims, that is, it is reduced to naturalized essences, myth quantifies by placing these essences one on top of the other within the discourse. We have seen several examples of this throughout the previous citations, where the virtual past of Negroes is added to the savageness of the race, which is added to the sexual indecency of its character, which is added to jazz's illegitimate nature as a high art, etc. The only result to the additive structure, to the quantification of qualities which are themselves reduced to essences, is the hopelessly circular, repetitive pattern that the essences follow, for each of them signifies on other essences, which through tautology and statement of fact signify on other essences and back to the signifier that had initially signified upon them. There is no cardinal essence within the structure just like there is no final one: the mystifying game is always one where the metalinguistic process of signification appears homogeneously, for such is the only way through which naturalization can be effective.

We must keep in mind that often times it is not only the jazz features which fall under the spell of mythical speech, but also the very Western standards which oppose them can be subjected to mystification. To use a recent example, what should we make of Austin's categorical claim of honesty, sincerity, and purity, or of Bell's defense of nobility and beauty? These concepts also represent essences, even if civilization has provided theories to establish the qualities of each. Beauty, for example, which can classically be approached through the parameters of harmony, symmetry and proportion, can also be found in jazz music. It is the variations within these parameters that appear insulting to Western taste: polyrhythm, syncopation, improvisation, call-response and the strange effects produced by experimenting in tone and timbre merge into cacophony to the classically-trained ear, but it is not to say that they lack proportion, symmetry or harmonic order. While pro-jazz white writers attested to the presence of these conventions in more or less amateurish vindications, anti-jazz advocates either ignored such qualities by superficially maintaining the discourse within the boundaries of racial myths, or attacked the variations of the parameters for their refusal to pay tribute to traditional forms. Syncopation, for example, seems to have been a particularly troubling matter: while Ansermet celebrated the preciseness and perfection with which it was practiced and called it "the genius of the race" (2004: 371), Faulkner believed that "the combination of the syncopated rhythm, accentuated by the constant use of the partial tones sounding off-pitch, has put syncopation too off-key" (2002: 153). Needless to say, it would be naïve to speculate that these values were considered in isolation from racial myths, and therefore, the game again elusively turns from one of scales to one of essences.

When, on the other hand, there was no analytical approach to the categorical standards of Western music (as in the case of Austin or Bell), but rather, these were presented as essences in themselves, the argument again became of an additive nature. The writer, in fact, has no need to demystify purity, nobility, or beauty; there is no urgency in quantifying the qualities of Western music. The writer assumes that the cultivated reader shares his or her homogeneous concept of the terms, and he or she assumes that he will react negatively to the variations of the concepts present in jazz. The bourgeoisie does not confine mythical speech to act solely upon that which appears strange or anti-bourgeois; it can also mystify that which it holds in the highest esteem. In the same way that jazz and negritude are discursively transformed into eternal nouns,

so can concepts such as beauty and nobility retain an absolute, quasi-proverbial meaning. The difference between the mystification of classical music and the mystification of jazz lies in the amount of motivation. Because of the latter's racial origin, the exposure to each of the rhetorical devices is much more colossal, for, as I have argued, there are a number of myths regarding blackness as a cultural construct within which jazz finds its niche. There is always intentionality behind myth, but its imperious force becomes much more insistent when it encounters a strange, alien element, one whose definition is vague. When commenting the propensity of jazz towards myth, I mentioned that the music's meaning was different from that of other concepts. Jazz appears to white society as a poor, incomplete image not because its meaning has been relieved from its fat, but because it never had a sustainable meaning to begin with. Its instant association to blacks, brothels, Semitism, immoral behavior, etc. made it impracticable for the music to solidify any first-order signification within white traditionalist culture. Bourgeois society does not know what to make of it and so it rapidly enmeshes it within mythical speech to colonize it and imperatively constrain it to its eternal place inside the order of things. This order of things, perceived by the bourgeoisie as natural, follows a carefully calculated hierarchy, the rigidity of which is governed by myth. Myth assures that both the negative and the exotic maintain a fixed position within the hierarchy just as much as it keeps (though without the necessity of such colonizing efforts) Western standards at the top. Depending on whether the myth-maker is pro or anti-jazz, attempts to immobilize the music within one rank or another are ardently carried out. Because in the late 1920s and throughout the swing craze jazz enthusiasts seemed to have triumphed over the downright negative views of traditionalists in positioning the idiom within a certain place in the hierarchy, it would be some time before it became accepted by the bourgeoisie as a worthy adversary to classical music in the establishment of America's autonomous high arts.

This section has made an overview of how the rhetorical techniques described by Barthes function within early white jazz discourses. True, not all whites agreed with the claims made either by jazz enthusiasts or the more traditionalist groups, and there are numerous texts by whites in which racism and mystification are not prevalent. These, however, seem rarer in comparison with the dominant white discourse, and are

generally regarded as the voices of underdogs by current jazz scholars. As I explained in the presentation of new mythographic possibilities, the amount and the discursive nature of the documents, along with the conclusions reached by other jazz and myth scholars, objectively demanded that this study should grant some space to analyzing the general mystifying tendencies constructed and utilized by white Americans in the first half of the twentieth century. The general trend seems to have been the one described above, but this does not mean that whites monolithically had the same ideas or projected identical images about jazz. In the remainder of this section, I continue to focus on these general trends of primitivism, depoliticizing and de-historizcizing as we follow the shifts in the white mainstream's perception of jazz, for the spirit of jazz asks that we not forget the paternalistic outlook of America on African American music. As Josephine Baker reportedly declared, "the white imagination sure is something when it comes to blacks" (Qtd. Rose 1989: 81).

2.4. JAZZ PRIMITIVISM AND THE PROBLEM OF AUTHENTICITY IN CARL VAN VECHTEN'S *NIGGER HEAVEN*

Perhaps no other book on black culture and society has stirred more controversy than Carl Van Vechten's (in)famous novel *Nigger Heaven*, published in 1926. The white-maned native of Cedar Rapids, a small Iowa town, seemed an unlikely candidate to popularize the creative atmosphere that saturated Harlem, yet he succeeded more than any other art patron and critic, black or white, in purporting the significance of uptown Manhattan as a valuable subject matter. Much has been written about the title of the book both during the late twenties and throughout subsequent decades, and the frequent disparagements against Van Vechten's poor choice of words have resulted in a generalized perception of the book on the basis of the striking use of the offensive term, where the title has metonymically conquered, or at least biased, popular perceptions of the actual content.[17] The reputation that preceded Van Vechten as an integrationist and

[17] Kathleen Pfeiffer notes other possible titles that Van Vechten had in mind, which included *The Great Black Walled City*, *White Tar*, and *Rest Yo Coat*. Van Vechten was not the first to use the term 'nigger' as part of the title: in 1909 Edward Sheldon had staged his play, *The Niggers*, in 1922 Clement Woods published *Nigger*, and that same year Van Vechten himself had succeeded in convincing Robert Firbank to change the name of his book from *Sorrow in Sunlight* to *Prancing Nigger.* In his notes, Van Vechten quoted a passage from *Folk Beliefs of the Southern Negro* in which an explanatory definition of the full term appeared:

> Nigger Heaven is an American slang expression for the topmost gallery of a theatre, so called because in certain of the United States, Negroes are arbitrarily forced to sit in these cheap seats. . . . The geographical position of Harlem, the Negro quarter of New York, corresponds to the location of the gallery in a theatre. (Qtd. Pfeiffer 2000: x)

Doubtless, Van Vechten was aware that the use of the word would be scandalous to many black circles and individuals within the community, as much as he was aware that such a publicity stunt would catapult sales immensely. As he evaluated the possibility, he received both encouraging and discouraging remarks from those with whom he shared his thoughts. His own father, Charles Duane Van Vechten, who had raised his children to address their black servants with the upmost respect and had been active in establishing a school for African Americans in Piney Woods, Mississippi, in vain wrote several letters to his son to persuade him to change his mind. Several incidents surrounding the reception of the book served to augment its quasi-clandestine appeal. *Nigger Heaven* was initially banned in Boston, some of its pages were burnt by a professor of Wilberforce College in a Harlem rally

as the eccentric New York socialite in whose apartment black and white artists mingled between drinks and conversations on the future of American aesthetic expression probably eased some of the critique that he received, especially on behalf of those who had benefitted from his favors and connections with publishers, editors, and stage directors. Still, the general responses to the book often fell in one of two fundamental arguments: *Nigger Heaven* was either a masterpiece in its portrayal of the Harlem middle and working class and in its depiction of underground spaces, or it was a defamatory and scandalous misrepresentation of negritude in its patronizing narrative style and derogatory exploitation of a material which only exposed the author's ignorance and confused sentiments about blackness and the race's efforts to be incorporated within the economic structure of the mainstream.

Well-known are the responses given by first and second generation Harlem Renaissance writers and artists. W.E.B. Du Bois's „talented tenth' philosophy was palpable throughout his negative remarks on the book.[18] "*Nigger Heaven* is a blow on the face. It is an affront to the hospitality of black folk and to the intelligence of white" (Qtd. Helbling 1976: 39), he wrote. Du Bois's outrage stemmed from the fact that Van Vechten had made his much distorted impressions of the cabaret the symbol of the entirety of Harlem: "[The author] is an authority on dives and cabarets. But he masses

---

to symbolically express repudiation, and during an open discussion of the book in the New York Public Library, attendants verbally abused a man they had mistaken for Van Vechten. For years after the publication, Van Vechten would continue to insist that the title was used ironically. As he told an interviewer, the problem laid in the fact that irony "is not anything that most Negroes understand, especially the ones who write for the papers" (Qtd. Huggins 2007: 113).

[18] The 'talented tenth' was a term used by Du Bois to refer to the black intellectual elite that would become the leaders of their race and would integrate African Americans within the economic structure of America as full and equal citizens. Du Bois stressed education and college training as the basic path to enable the uplift of the race not only as workers, but more importantly, as dignified men. In his 1903 essay, "The Talented Tenth," he declared that the problem of education among Negroes "is the problem of developing the Best of this race that they may guide the mass away from the contamination of the Worst" (Du Bois 2004: 185). Works which he conceived as propagandistic and sensationalist, of which *Nigger Heaven* was a prime example, tended to deform the image of the race in such a way that the process towards uplift became susceptible to further attacks on the inadequacy of blacks to improve their societal and economic position, regardless of the education they received.

this knowledge without rule or reason and seeks to express all of Harlem life in its cabarets. To him the black cabaret is Harlem; around it all his characters gravitate. . . . Such a theory of Harlem is nonsense" (Qtd. Helbling 1976: 39). Joel A. Rogers was just as aggravated, declaring the novel to be "smut with a sympathetic setting" (Qtd. Smalls 2006: 51), and Countee Cullen resolved to end his relationship with Van Vechten. On the side of so-called „Van Vechtenites' were the approving voices of Alain Locke, Langston Hughes, James Weldon Johnson, and Nella Larsen, among others. Locke championed the author's boldness and sensitiveness, calling the book "art" and "subcutaneous propas," and praised Van Vechten for "[bringing] us a step nearer the flush level of Negro material in American art" (Qtd. Hebling 1976: 40). In a similar line, Nella Larsen wrote a letter to Van Vechten applauding his talent and sincerity, and lamented the fact that black writers had overlooked the cornucopia of available material in Harlem: "You see it's too close, too true, as if you had undressed the lot of us and turned on a strong light. Too, I feel a kind of despair. Why, oh why, couldn't we have done something as big as this for ourselves?" (Qtd. Hutchinson 2006: 210).

The partial, yet intense hostility with which the novel backfired only increased its popularity, making it a bestseller and establishing Van Vechten as a knowledgeable authority in transmitting to the white public what went on in Harlem. *Nigger Heaven* was translated to ten languages and went through fourteen printings in two years, and for a decade, Carl Van Vechten was the preferential host to escort white visitors into the vivid Harlem night-life. This latter effect of the novel should not be undermined, for Van Vechten pioneered the 1920s en vogue zest for exploration of uptown jazz clubs, as thrill-seeking whites crossed the black belt in a tourist-like fashion. Indeed, the aura of the Van Vechten persona, a recurrent target in the New York press, reached as much fame as the book itself, and pro-*Nigger Heaven* advocates often defended the work on the basis of its author's active compromise to harmonize black art within the category of respected arts. Almost twenty-five years after the publication of the book, George Schuyler wrote a profile of Van Vechten in which he acknowledged his trend-setting behavior, one that transformed race relations in the metropolis:

> His disciples were the minority that tell the majority what to think, wear, see and hear, and they have multiplied tremendously in the past quarter century. It has now become smart to be tolerant, understanding, and appreciative

> interracially, and if any one person can be credited in bringing about this revolution it is Carl Van Vechten. (1950: 364)

From a scholarly distance, much has been commented in later years about the actual literary merits of *Nigger Heaven* and Van Vechten's self-appointment as a reliable insider to black culture. The charges against the sensationalist exoticism and propagandistic enterprise appearing in the novel have not been dropped, nor should they. Indeed, *Nigger Heaven* is plagued with distorted conceptions of negritude. The two main characters, Byron and Mary, reveal their obsession with savageness and the heritage of racial primitiveness, a legacy that sometimes borders on being perceived as a curse by them. The cabarets that graphically and glowingly illustrate the Harlem atmosphere are brought to life by the frenetic sounds of a jungle music to which the wild black masses barbarically stomp to, uninhibitedly exposing their sexual desires. As I mentioned above, although the very title should not be regarded as synecdochical of the entire book, it nonetheless unavoidably supports theories on Van Vechten's tendentiousness towards primitiveness, and attests to the zeal for tabloid exposure that was so much a part of his character. Scholarly efforts to maintain objectiveness in the reading of *Nigger Heaven*, therefore, have unequivocally resulted in reassertions of the Vechtenite exoticism and primitivism. What postcolonial and post-structuralist criticism have provided, however, are fresh analyses about the book's influence on other Harlem Renaissance writers (Coleman 1998), a leveling of the original extremist reactions through a reevaluation of Van Vechten's commitment to Negro artists and to the working (not the middle and upper-middle) classes (Pfeiffer 2000), and depictions of the novel's Negro dialect according to Signifyin(g) Theory (Borst 2009) and cross-racial voicing (D. Holmes 2006).

In these pages, I examine the cabaret scenes of *Nigger Heaven* to evaluate how Van Vechten's primitivist myth sets the precedent to the much-debated issue of jazz authenticity and authorship. Although *Nigger Heaven* does not stand as a jazz novel per se, the cabaret chapters, like the title, have acquired the representative status of the novel, for they are certainly the most vivid, un-plasticized descriptions within a story where the general style borders on insipidness and prosaic humdrumness. Within a Barthean framework, authenticity appears to have been the underlying intentionality in Van Vechten's primitivist myth. Pfeiffer notes that the author "was known to declare that cataloguing was an important part of his personality, and this predisposition shapes

Nigger Heaven with its pastiche of black and white" (2000: xxviii). Let us remember that Barthes stipulated that the purpose of the bourgeois myth was to transform the concept's history into nature so as to create a new identity for it, one that fits and preserves the expectancies of the dominant class hierarchies. As good as his intentions may have been, and although Van Vechten did strive for the consolidation of an integrated, equalitarian society, he committed the same mistakes and indulged in the same discursive abuse that the pro-jazz writers we have seen above were inclined to. As white society was slowly negotiating through mystification what to make of, and how to come to terms with black culture, Van Vechten's eagerness to pursue Harlem as subject matter and his always eccentric personality provided an image of negritude that, in the view of many, did little justice to the race's intellectual facets. Van Vechten often insisted thereafter that what he had described was true, and that not only had he been faithful to such an environment but moreover, he had attempted to celebrate it, to show it to the white public so that they could finally realize the splendor and grandness of black culture. He succeeded in this affair, but the grandeur that the white public was so enthralled by was not one based on equality, but on fascination and awe at the sight and sound of exoticism. By addressing how these fictionalized scenes were constructed as a means to authenticate jazz and the blues, we may better comprehend the germination of the trouble of racial ownership of the music. Adjacent to the notion of authenticity, is the exercise of authority and authorship; Van Vechten being the liberal trendsetter and the American aesthete that he was, it is improbable that he ever perceived his work as patronizing in any way. He was, nonetheless, a man of his time, and hints of condescendence indicating his conviction that he was an authority on negritude are discernible. The analysis, therefore is not merely based on the question of to what extent *Nigger Heaven* is mythopoeic in its construction of negative stereotypes of negritude, but also how this mythopoeia, because of its association with the notion of authenticity, is an anteceding criterion to contemporary debates about the racial ownership of jazz.

2.4.1. Jazz Characters and the Cabaret Underground

The novel revolves around the love story of Mary Love, a prim librarian, and Byron Kasson, a Philadelphia college graduate whose dreams to become a prominent writer are slowly and painfully shattered as he feels himself degraded professionally and as a human being by the New York black and white societies. Construed in a melodramatic fashion, the two protagonists confront and indulge in their own frustrations as middle-class intellectuals whose color limits their ambitions and aspirations. Mary stoically appears to accept that despite her exquisite expertise in literature and the arts, she will never be promoted nor given the opportunity to take on a more intellectually challenging position. As she almost dispassionately regards these matters, her thoughts become agitated when she reflects on her own civility as a woman and as a Negro, a civility with which she often becomes enraged, as she contemplates her impotence to naturally behave in the primitivist way that all members of the black race should. Mary's genteelness is met by Byron's idealism and confident pomposity. The couple fall in love but it is not long before the self-consciousness underlying Byron's arrogance becomes manifest. Unable to meet his expectations of himself and enmeshed in self-pity, soon enough Byron begins to identify Mary as the cause of his failure. As Mary effortlessly persuades him to write about blackness from a sincere point of view, Byron's increasing dismay leads him to regard Mary as a castrating, patronizing matriarch. Byron feels that his talent is downgraded, and that his resistance to racial categories as a writer is misunderstood. Finding himself unable to please Mary, his volatile feelings turn to fury when a white magazine editor (based on H.L. Mencken) condescendingly offers him the same advice as her. Partly as a revenge on Mary and partly as surrender to the Harlem savage underground, Byron then loses himself to a tumultuous sexual affair with Lasca Sartoris, a rich widow of a French government official. The hedonistic and sexually insatiable Lasca soon tires of Byron, and with an indifference of manner disposes of him. Having lost all control of himself, Byron prowls a cabaret to shoot Randolph Pettijohn, the Bolito king, Lasca's new sexual toy. But even his murderous instinct is precluded: as Byron takes his aim, the Scarlet Creeper, a Harlem pimp, shoots Pettijohn and flees. The last scene shows a pitiful Byron beside himself, shooting bullets into the corpse before being arrested by the police.

In the backdrop of the plot is the Harlem night world of cabarets, jazz, orgies, drugs and prostitution. These present a stark contrast to the intellectual circles and genteel households of Mary's acquaintances, where the racial issue, often artificially, is repeatedly discussed. As Huggins (2007) and Coleman (1998) have pointed out, the most colorful characters are not Byron and Mary, but Anatole Longfellow, alias the Scarlet Creeper, and Lasca Sartoris. The sharp, cunning, Scarlet Creeper makes his appearance three times throughout the novel. In the glossary of Negro words and phrases, Van Vechten defines „creeper' as "a man who invades another's marital rights" (2000: 285). Indeed, the reader is not given any information as to how the Creeper earns his wages, but indications of a lifestyle as pimp and bootlegger are hinted. A description of the Scarlet Creeper strutting down Seventh Avenue opens the novel:

> He wore a tight-fitting suit of shepherd's plaid which thoroughly revealed his lithe, sinewy figure to all who gazed upon him, and all gazed. A great diamond, or some less valuable stone which aped a diamond, glistened in his fuchsia cravat. The uppers of his highly polished tan boots were dove-colored suède and the buttons were pale blue. His black hair was sleek under his straw hat, set at a jaunty angle. When he saluted a friend – and his acquaintanceship seemed to be wide – two rows of pearly teeth gleamed from his seal-brown countenance. (Van Vechten 2000: 3)[19]

The sleek Creeper uses his personal dress code as a mark of distinction; to his lustrous attire he adds a gold watch and an ebony cane tipped with an ivory ball. The people he passes by greet him respectfully, either on the grounds of fear or of admiration. The Creeper is confident of the effect he produces. "Was there another sheik in Harlem who possessed one-tenth his attraction for the female sex? Was there another of whose muscles the brick-pressers . . . were more afraid?" (6), he boastfully asks himself. After a brief encounter with Pettijohn, he continues his way humming "mah man's got teeth lak a lighthouse on duh sea / an' when he smiles he throws dem lights on me" (8), lyrics in which Van Vechten may have been echoing W.C. Handy's popular tune, "St. Louis Blues."[20] At a corner, he joins a group dancing the Charleston, and sets his eye on his

[19] Hereon all citations belonging to *Nigger Heaven* will be indicated solely through page number.

[20] "St. Louis Blues" was published by Handy in September 1914 and was the result of what the composer and arranger explained as a mixture of the blues, ragtime, tango, and spirituals. Handy's

prey. Her name is Ruby, and she is completely allured by the Creeper and his sexual reputation. The couple head for a cabaret, significantly called Black Venus, and the reader gets his first insight into Van Vechten's jazz scene. As if descending to the depths of humanity, the Creeper and Ruby walk down to a basement and through a long hallway that leads to the dance-floor. The setting suddenly becomes alive as "the sensual blare of jazz, slow, wailing jazz, stroked their ears" (12). The highly sexualized atmosphere is one resulting from the animalizing music. Couples dance "in such close proximity that their bodies melted together as they swayed and rocked to the tormented howling of the brass" (12), the waiter "Charlestoned down the floor to the intoxicating rhythm," and then, "like a cat . . . [shuffled] ingeniously from one side of the room to the other" (13). After a quick drink, the Creeper and Ruby dissolve into the mass of dark collages:

> On all sides of the swaying couple, bodies in picturesque costumes rocked, black bodies, brown bodies, high yellows, a kaleidoscope of colour transfigured by the amber searchlight. Scarves of bottle green, cerise, amethyst, vermilion, lemon. The drummer in complete abandon tossed his sticks in the air while he shook his head like a wild animal. The saxophone player drew a dilapidated derby over the bowl of his instrument, smothering

---

colorful description of the how the song came to be in his autobiography is today part of the wider body of classic narratives on the birth of jazz classics. In a deplorable and broken state, while in St. Louis, Handy encounters his muse:

> While occupied with my own miseries during that sojourn, I had seen a woman whose pain seemed even greater. She had tried to take the edge of her grief by heavy drinking, but it hadn't worked. Stumbling along the poorly lighted street, she muttered as she walked, "Ma man's got a heart like a rock cast in the sea."
>
> The expression interested me, and I stopped another woman to inquire what she meant. She replied, "Lawd, man, it's hard and gone so far from her she can't reach it." Her language was the same down-home medium that conveyed the laughable woe of lamp-blacked lovers in hundreds of frothy songs, but her plight was much too real to provoke much laughter. My song was taking shape. I had now settled upon the mood. (Handy, 1991: 119)

It is unclear whether Van Vechten was actually attempting to emulate the song's lyrics, but given his knowledge of W.C. Handy's work it is quite likely. If so, the Scarlet Creeper's transformation of the lyrics may be a means to indicate the character's talent for reinvention (a talent he applies, as we have seen, to his clothing), and his pride in the irresistible effect he has over women. From an original tune in which the female singer voices her raw exasperation in conjunction with the tragicomic aspects of black experience, the Creeper delights in conjuring a woman's point of view to describe himself.

> the din. The banjos played deliriously. The band snored and snorted and whistled and laughed like a hyena. (14)

The bestializing intensity is lost when the music stops, and the bodies "[lose] the secret of the magic rhythm (15). A frenetic Ruby, intoxicated by the wildness, rapturously tells the Creeper: "Dis place, where Ah met you – Harlem. Ah calls et, specherly tonight, Ah calls it Nigger Heaven! I jes' nacherly think dis heah is Nigger Heaven!" (15).

The Scarlet Creeper makes his second appearance when Byron enters a cabaret after a quarrel with Mary. The carnal atmosphere attracts the receptive Byron, as "the jazz band vomited, neighed, barked, and snorted" to initiate "the barbaric ceremony" (212). Byron gets his first glimpse of the Creeper, who in a "catlike" gait eases through the dancers. Accompanying him is "a sinister, hunchback dwarf with a wizened, wrinkled, black face like a monkey's" (213), and the visually striking pair take a seat near Byron's table. Byron overhears their conversation; the Creeper is threatening to kill a man that has had the audacity to steal Ruby from him. Little does Byron know that this plan will cheat him out of his destiny. The Creeper's story comes full circle in the final scene, when Byron scouts through the Black Venus before carrying out his scheme to finish off Pettijohn. The grotesqueness of the ambience overwhelms Byron: "It all became a jumble . . . of meaningless phrases accompanied by the hard, insistent, regular beating of the drum, the groaning of the saxophone, the shrill squealing of the clarinet" (278). In the background, a girl is singing a blues asking her lover to come back to her. Byron's misogynist hatred towards Lasca (he inwardly calls her a "whore" and a "she-devil") is extended to the rest of the female crowd:

> Would that drummer never stop? Jungle! Savages! Amber moonlight! Why did that girl have a purple face? Rouge on chocolate. And that other girl was green as olive. Powder on chocolate. Shebas, golden-brown shebas. Lousy Niggers, all of 'em. Drinking, laughing, sniffing snow, getting ready to push him down. (279-280)

Byron suddenly catches a glimpse of the Creeper dancing, but turns his attention on Pettijohn as he sees him walking towards him. In a last effort to regain his dignity through an act of agency, Byron awaits his victim, but in the jazz-suffused cabaret, only the Creeper can carry out his „heroic' deed.

The Creeper's female alter ego is Lasca Sartoris, who Van Vechten based on the sensational singer and composer Nora Holt. Like the Creeper, Lasca is in masterful command of the jazz atmosphere; she embodies the music's wildness and craze with a primitive sexuality that no man can resist. The two characters do not cross paths, but they mirror one another. They both have a reputation in Harlem that sparks a mixture of admiration, respect, and even fear. The first time that a physical description of Lasca is given is through a photograph, under the contemplative and somewhat envious gaze of Mary. "What was it, even in this dead, flat counterpart, that gave to the lady the impression of supervitality?" (80) Mary muses. Even the frozen quality of the picture is more spirited than Mary, who "becomes aware at once of the abundant sex-appeal in this lithe creature's body" (80). Adora, an ex-cabaret performer, relates to Mary the story of Lasca, whose effigy-like presence fills the room and Mary's imagination. Adora touches on Lasca's „creeper' qualities when she claims that "she's just naturally full o' pep and she bounces the papas off their rails" (85). As the novel progresses, Mary finds herself reflecting on Lasca's exotic nature time and again. Lasca finally makes her appearance at the Charity Ball, but not before Mary is told that the scandalous widow is wearing a loud red, *scarlet* dress. Foreshadowing Lasca's „creeper' nature, Van Vechten, however, finally presents her in blue, dancing with Byron, under the bewildered stare of Mary:

> There he was, dancing with the exotic Negro sense of rhythm which made time a thing in space. In his arms was the most striking woman Mary had ever seen. A robe of turquoise-blue satin clung to her exquisite body, brought out in relief every curve. The dress was cut so low in front that the little depression between her firm, round breasts was plainly visible. Her golden-brown back was entirely nude to the waist. The dress was circled with wide bands of green and black sequins, designed to resemble the fur of the leopard. A tiara of sapphires sparkled in her hair, and a choker of these stones, around her throat. (163)

The already powerful presence that Lasca had projected through the photograph is further intensified through the Africaness of her clothing and her movement. Later in the novel, when she casually picks up Byron from the street, her carefree spirits and primitive passions are manifested discursively. Her seduction of Byron sways between an aesthete-like insouciance and raw sexuality. At a certain point she tells Byron that "Sometimes, I think I'd like to die, I get so bored. It's so tiresome to be uniformly

successful. I get so fed up with life that I could scream" (236). In contrast to this are moments when her untamed sexuality reveals itself, as when half-pleadingly, and half-commandingly, she raucously entices him: "I want you to possess me, to own me. I want to be your slave, your Nigger, your own Nigger! (239). On a night out, after Byron has moved into Lasca's apartment, the real descent to the underworld of jazz and negritude takes shape. The night begins jovially at a mixed cabaret. Lasca impresses everyone with her proficiency dancing the Charleston, and playfully instructs Byron in the Black Bottom steps. The cabaret being for white and black crowds, Van Vechten describes the type of jazz being played as soft, sensual, exquisite, and refined. The animalization of the instruments is decorously restrained, as "the saxophone cooed like a turtle dove [and] the drumbeat seemed to reverberate from a distance" (245). As the hours pass, the night becomes prey to the spell of blackness. A passionate fight between two women is followed by the appearance of an entertainer "dressed in scarlet" dancing in a "shivering ecstasy" to produce a "strange, seismic performance" (249). Soon the whole dance floor gives in to the contagiousness: "There were camel-walkers, symptoms of the twa-twa and the skate. A pretty mulatto broke away from her partner and moved her hands convulsively up and down her body in the throes of the itch" (250). At sunrise, Lasca and Byron head outdoors. In a taxi, they sniff "the happy dust" (251) and order the driver to "drive to hell":

> The chauffer scratched his head. I guess you means duh Black Mass. . . .
>
> What's that? Byron inquired.
>
> It's a garden where champagne flows from all the fountains and the paths are made of happy dust and the perfume of the poppies is opium. Kiss me!
>
> I'd like to be cruel to you! she cried, after she had momentarily slaked her thirst. I'd like to cut your heart out!
>
> Cut it out, Lasca, my own! It belongs to you!
>
> I'd like to bruise you!
>
> Lasca, adorable!
>
> I'd like to gash you with a knife!
>
> Lasca! Lasca!
>
> Beat you with a whip!
>
> Lasca!
>
> She drew her pointed nails across the back of his hands. The flesh came off in ribbons. (252-253)

But Byron's masochism is only superficial and temporary. At the Black Mass, he gradually becomes aware of the macabre instincts of his race. The room once more becomes a kaleidoscope of colors, and the myriad of shades connote the wilderness of far-away lands of barbaric rituals:

> The floor was of translucent glass, and through this clouds of light flowed, now orange, now deep purple, now flaming like molten lava, now rolling sea-waves of green. An invisible band, silent at the moment they had entered this deserted room, now began to perform wild music, music that moaned and lacerated one's breast with brazen claws of tone, shrieking, tortured music from the depths of hell. (254)

The dancers are revealed as cadaverous faces of "dead prostitutes and murderers," the morbid countenances of "pleasure seekers from the cold slabs of the morgue" (254). A woman in a black satin cloak stands motionless at the center of the floor. The robe is removed and she stands completely nude. Disturbed and intrigued, Byron watches the terrifying execution of the wild ritual:

> She was pure black, with savage African features, thick nose, thick lips, bushy hair which hovered about her face like a lanate halo, while her eyes rolled back so far that only the whites were visible. And now she began to perform her evil rites. . . . Byron groaned and hid his face in his hands. He could hear Lasca emitting little clucks of amazement. Standing before him, she protected him from the horror . . . while she watched. When he looked again, the light on the body was purple; the body was purple. The girl lifted a knife. . . . A woman shrieked. The knife . . . (255-256)

The penetrating qualities of the knife push to the extreme Van Vechten's fusion of sexuality, masochism, savagery, bestiality, and exoticism. Lasca and the sanguine Creeper are the ambassadors of the passions produced in the Harlem cabarets, passions with features resembling witchcraft, through which the individual abandons his sense of self and dissolves into a collectivity governed by the spasms, urges and impulses of black corporeality. Lasca and the Creeper are archetypes of authentic blackness, an ideal Mary and Byron, in the end, can only yearn for. Several times throughout the novel, Mary reflects on her flaws as a member of the Negro race. She is repelled by promiscuity and rudeness of character; she abhors cabarets and is cold to the men that approach her, including Pettijohn. And yet she longs to feel the primitive instincts that must somehow be flowing through her veins to be free: "Why, Mary asked herself, is

this denied to me? We are all savages, she repeated to herself, all apparently, but me!" (90). Van Vechten suggests that it is Mary's contamination with white restraint and genteelness which has alienated her from her people. Her very insistence on convincing herself that she needs to release her passions is in itself a superficial endeavor, for the authentic expression of negritude must come naturally. The closest Mary can be to her people is by presenting an exhibition of primitive African art at the library. She searches in this collection for the key to her racial liberation, but can only succeed in interpreting it from an intellectual perspective. The same distorting mediation is produced at the Charity Ball, when Mary observes how two women take on each other for the love of a man. As if in the presence of a museum piece, Mary is struck by the spontaneity of their primitive and savage behavior (164). Not even the powerful Lasca can madden the prim Mary enough to deliver her from her whiteness. As a counterpoint to Mary, Lasca can naturally allure Byron; she owns him sexually and hence instinctively, and it is through her that a glimpse of Byron's primitiveness can be discerned. Mary wants to believe that her hatred for Lasca is pure, but her inability to naturally express it becomes her fatal weakness: "How she longed for the strength, the primitive impulse that would urge her to spring at Lasca's throat, tear away the collar of sapphires" (166). Her jealousy emerges as a test of her faithfulness to her race, one which she expectedly fails: "I can't do it, she moaned. I ought to kill her, I want to, but I can't. What's wrong with me?" (167).

Byron comes closer than Mary to releasing his primitiveness, but he neither understands it nor can he fully confront it in the end. We do not know whether he would have actually been able to murder Pettijohn had not the Scarlet Creeper, shooting over his shoulder as if embodying the obscure shadows of the self, beat him to the deed. Byron's murdering of Pettijohn would indeed have been inconsistent to his character; it is as if destiny deprives him of his task because he has not proven himself as an authentic Negro. The final image is not even one of a whitened black individual, but a grotesque pantomime of a humiliated marionette.

Byron's misunderstanding of negritude is implicit in all his actions. He neglects Mary for what he perceives as an emasculating attitude, but Lasca treats him no better than a puppet. Her feelings for him vertiginously leap from indifference to unrestrained sexual passion, until they are finally stabilized in the form of scorn. Her behavior, in fact, is a conglomeration of the general thematic trends in women's classical blues of

the 1920s. Jealousy, masochism, murderous rage and sexual insatiability, as I have stated earlier in this study, were common motifs in early women's blues, whether these answered to a more rural and country style or to the vaudeville and urban cabaret design.

2.4.2. Racial Authenticity, Aestheticist Sincerity and the Primitivist Myth

Lasca's authenticity as heiress of women's blues themes is helpful to initiate the discussion on the author's view of racial authenticity. Van Vechten was an ardent admirer of female blues singers; in fact, he is often credited with launching the career of Ethel Waters, and Bessie Smith frequented his parties and even posed for his collection of Negro photography.[21] A well-known description of the latter was given by Van Vechten after attending a concert in the Orpheum Theatre in Newark, a year prior to the release of *Nigger Heaven.* Notice that the same motifs that the writer would use in his creation of Lasca are present in his description of Smith:

> She wore a crimson satin robe, sweeping up from her trim ankles, and embroidered in multicolored sequins in design. Her face was beautiful with the rich ripe beauty of southern darkness, a deep bronze brown, matching the bronze of her bare arms, walking slowly to the footlights, to the accompaniment of the wailing, muted brasses, to the monotonous African pounding of the drum, the dromedary glide of the pianist's fingers over the responsive keys, she began her strange, rhythmic rites in a voice full of shouting and moaning and praying and suffering, a wild, rough Ethiopian voice, harsh and volcanic, but seductive and sensuous too . . . (Qtd. Balliett 2005: 154)

[21] At the Van Vechten apartment, Smith entertained guests with her singing, but further fascinated her host with what he perceived as an instinctive code of conduct. Smith's biographer, Chris Albertson, has reconstructed the famous incident in which the singer threw Van Vechten's wife, Fania Marinoff, to the floor. Based on the testimony given by Ruby Walker, Smith's niece, Albertson describes how after the performance, Marinoff reached to hug Smith. Enraged at her audacity, Smith curses at Marinoff and pushes her off. As the singer leaves the party, Van Vechten trails behind pusillanimously, assuring her that no offense has been taken: "It's alright, Miss Smith . . . you were magnificent tonight" (Qtd. Albertson 2003: 175), he tells her.

1925 was also the year that Van Vechten expressed his admiration for the blues through two *Vanity Fair* articles, "The Black Blues" and "Negro „Blues' Singers", and a review in the *New York Tribune*, "Mean Old Miss Blues Becomes Respectable." These writings contain his general sentiment about the need for the African American community to acknowledge the value of this priceless aesthetic material. In "The Black Blues," he wrote that the blues "in beauty and imaginative significance far transcend in their crude poetic importance the words of the religious songs. They are eloquent with rich idioms, metaphoric phrases and striking word combinations" (Van Vechten 1979: 44). This statement is concomitant to what Coleman identifies as Van Vechten's tendency to point out "that Negroes look down upon their own music, refusing to appreciate the artistic value of the blues because the blues are humble in origin and occasionally too frank in expression" (1998: 86).

Van Vechten's persistence in illuminating African Americans about their aesthetic heritage was not limited to the blues. Before publishing *Nigger Heaven*, he had turned down Alain Locke's offer to write an introduction to *The New Negro* because of pressing time. His views on the establishment of black arts, however, were collected in *The Crisis* in a symposium called "The Negro in Art: How Shall He Be Portrayed?" Alongside H.L. Mencken and DuBose Hayward, Van Vechten devoted a column and a half to raise the pressing issues concerning black aesthetics. Among his questions were the following:

> Is not the continual portrayal of the sordid, foolish and criminal among Negroes convincing the world that this and this alone is really and essentially Negroid, and preventing white artists from knowing any other types and preventing black artists from daring to paint them?
>
> Is there not a real danger that young colored writers will be tempted to follow the popular trend in portraying Negro character in the underworld rather than seeking to paint the truth about themselves and their own social class? (Van Vechten 1926: 219)

Van Vechten's comments appear striking and somewhat contradictory to his fiction. On the one hand, *Nigger Heaven* did attempt to break with the tradition of minstrelsy that had stigmatized blacks with a mocked image of stupidity and simplicity. David Holmes (2006) states that Van Vechten is a case example of a white writer attempting to adapt to black language and discourse, but that this act deviates from minstrelsy in that the writer does not seek to control the collective image of African Americans. It is true that

although the most colorful episodes in *Nigger Heaven* are those featuring Lasca and the Scarlet Creeper (that is, those for the most part set in the underground Harlem cabarets) characters and scenarios from the genteel and intellectual middle class are shown. Moreover, it is these spaces which become the platform for the countless discussions about Negro art in the novel, whether in mono or interracial discussions. In this sense, *Nigger Heaven* does not aim to control a collective image, providing instead a varied array of the multiple castes and circles of black society and constructing, although often artificially, dialogues where the reader may gather the disparate positions regarding the significance of the New Negro.

On the other hand, Van Vechten's obsession with authenticity indicates that although in neglect of minstrelsy, there is a patronizing stance to make the Negro artist „sincere.' The same advice that Mary and the white editor offer Byron is given by Van Vechten to the entirety of black artists – to be naturally true and faithful to the spirit of the race, which is to be found somewhere within the individual's biology. Nowhere does Van Vechten indicate that Mary's yearn to be delivered into black primitiveness is distorted, or even an exaggeration. Except for Lasca, the Scarlet Creeper, and the anonymous dancers that enliven the cabarets, all the other characters seem lost, lacking in heroism and will. Their discourse is embellished with intellectual decorum, often ridiculously pedantic; circumlocutions and euphemisms mask their spontaneity. By suggesting such a contrast to the novel's jazz characters, is not Van Vechten, to some extent, controlling the image of the African American? He acknowledges that there is a danger in solely focusing on writing about the Negro underworld, but despite his description of middle-class characters and spaces, he is inclined to support the lower atmosphere of black entertainment for its sincere environment. This exercise of control is none other than the distortion characteristic of Barthean mystification. *Nigger Heaven* was published the same year that Osgood's *So this Is Jazz* came out. Let us remember that this was a highly mystified attempt to articulate a jazz history on the basis of a clearly marked distinction between high and low arts. During this time, as we have seen, vacillations on the meaning of jazz as music and jazz as a term enabled the colonization of the concept through myth. Like others before and after him, Van Vechten assimilates black culture through a privation of history, and provides instead an exotic image of Africaness through colors and the dancers' ritualistic performances.

In the symposium he goes on to claim that "the squalor of Negro life, the vice of Negro life, offer a wealth of novel, exotic, picturesque material to the artist," and that unless black writers use it, it will be exhausted by white writers. In other words, Van Vechten is advising the Negro artist to authoritatively take control of his aesthetic, for, given his background, he will find his expression to be sincere when approaching such a material, and a more authentic account of the Harlem creative atmosphere will be recorded. As one who had ventured into writing about negritude in Harlem, Van Vechten did not regard himself as the average white writer; rather, he legitimized his right to take on the subject matter. In 1924, his expeditions into the Harlem nocturne culture in the company of Walter White, author of *Fire in the Flint*, gave him enough confidence to consider himself an insider. Recalling the instrumental role that White had in his submersion into Harlem, Van Vechten claimed that in two weeks "I knew practically every famous Negro in New York" (Qtd. Bernard 2001: xxxix). The list included James Weldon Johnson, Langston Hughes, Paul Robeson, and Countee Cullen, among others, and it was through conversations, dinners and parties with them that the author carried out his research. In the view of many, including, as we have seen, Alain Locke, his increasing appearance within black intellectual circles made him a qualified spokesman of the Negro cause.

In March 1926, the same month that *The Crisis* printed its symposium and in the midst of the publicity of Van Vechten's forthcoming Harlem novel, Miguel Covarrubias gifted the writer with one of his sketches. The sketch, titled "A Prediction," showed a black-faced Van Vechten in a bowtie with protruding thick lips and gapped bucked teeth. In his diary, other than calling it a caricature (2003: 111), Van Vechten does not make any other observation about it. Today, under the prism of postcolonial criticism, "A Prediction" is highly significant for its symbolism of what is perceived as Van Vechten's passing into negritude. In her examination of passing as a modernist phenomenon, Pamela Caughie recovers the portrait in relation to the negative review of *Nigger Heaven* written by D.H. Lawrence and the appraisal given by Wallace Thurman. Caughie interprets the drawing as a reconciling of Lawrence's belief that "passing across racial boundaries risks homogenizing the differences (actual and imagined) necessary for identification" and Thurman's claim that the novel offered "genuine rhythms peculiar to Harlem" (Caughie 2005: 399). Several considerations regarding Van Vechten's qualifications as an authority on Harlem Negro culture are suggested

through this one sketch. Van Vechten's passing is one based on the acceptance, the opening of the black intelligentsia and jazz subculture to him, not on actual racial integration. Does this type of passing legitimize Van Vechten as an authority of the entirety of Harlem life? Does it provide him with an authentic view of negritude? Does it earn him a right to write about it? Are there or should there exist some form of testing to earn such rights?

These matters continue to be under discussion, and the jazz discourse, as I have already stated several times throughout this study, is a field where the debate continues to be incited. In the beginning I referred to the press encounter between Nat Hentoff and Amiri Baraka as a notorious demonstration of the heated argument on racial ownership of the music. Whereas Van Vechten's writing was clearly immersed in exoticism and primitivism, Nat Hentoff's exquisite insight into jazz music, musicianship, and history puts him at an entirely different level, one that has earned him one of the most respectable positions within the insulated circle of jazz critics. Regardless of his expertise, however, Baraka did not accept his views on the grounds of racial boundaries. *Nigger Heaven*'s scandalous presentation of the jazz underground and the lifestyle of Van Vechten can be regarded as precursors to such arguments, what Tony Whyton calls "the three „A's in jazz: authorship, authority and authenticity" (2010: 58). The emergence of a jazz canon and the acknowledgement of a jazz tradition has complicated and diversified the discussion immensely, for now there are certain assumptions that black and white jazz writers share a priori. As Whyton notes,

> In order to achieve a sense of the autonomous and authentic in jazz . . . a certain degree of historical revisionism has occurred in order to demonstrate that the music has stood the test of time and has always been regarded as art rather than as merely popular music. (2010: 68-69)

Today, jazz is assumed to be a high art, and there is an endeavor to show that despite early interpretations neglecting it as such, jazz overcame adversities and conquered its critics. During Van Vechten's time not only were such assumptions yet to be established but moreover, the questions were still in their embryonic stage. Nonetheless, it is important to understand that the origin of the jazz racial ownership argument can be found in its primal form in the controversy surrounding *Nigger Heaven*'s allegations about Negro culture and in the way it was publicly received. For the white public

contaminated by racist beliefs, the fact that Van Vechten was white attested to his sincerity, and his participation in Negro culture to his authority. For some black intellectuals, such as Du Bois, Van Vechten's inability to fathom the multiple aspects of negritude should have inhibited him from authorship, while for others, such as Johnson and Hughes, his hybrid scope as outsider and insider graced him with a unique perspective.

The complex matter of artistic legitimacy is even furthered in *Nigger Heaven* if we evaluate Van Vechten's position as an aesthete. Lionel Trilling has traced the role that sincerity and authenticity have had in Western literature and culture. For Trilling, Shakespeare epitomizes an era in which sincerity was intrinsically bound to moral virtue. According to Trilling, earlier archetypal figures such as Beowulf or Achilles "neither have nor lack sincerity" (1982: 2), but by the emergence of Elizabethan theater, sincerity has germinated as a motive underlying the heroic deed. Sincerity can be defined as "the avoidance of being false to any man through being true to one's own self"; it is a stage which "is not to be attained without the most arduous effort" (Trilling 1982: 5, 6). It is, in other words, the sublimation of "the best self" and "the own self" (Trilling 1982: 5). But sincerity, Trilling continues, began its decadence in Romanticism and fin-de-siècle culture, to the point where modernism advocated, in the words of Eliot, "a continual extinction of the personality" (Qtd. Trilling 1982: 7). As surrogate to the devaluation of sincerity, appeared the Western artists' personas: "Their achieved existence as artists precluded their being men speaking to men," Trilling explains, "from which it follows that the criterion of sincerity, the calculation of the degree of congruence between feeling and avowal, is not pertinent to the judgment of their work" (1982: 7). Consequently, "to impute to [the poet] a personal existence is a breach of literary decorum" (Trilling 1982: 8). In its extremist version, sincerity leads to the concept of authenticity:

> [Authenticity suggests] a more strenuous moral experience than „sincerity' does, a more exigent conception of the self and of what being true to it consists in, a wider reference to the universe and man's place in it, and a less acceptant and genial view of the social circumstances of life. (Trilling 1982: 11)

Van Vechten was a practitioner of the Wildean aestheticism in America. He was obsessed with beauty, exoticism and Orientalism as much as with the loom of boredom.

He sought refuge in the sensuousness of art and excess of entertainment, often in the form of lavish parties and alcohol. Life was to be an imitation of art; only in this way could the artist overcome the dullness of a social and political existence in decadence. Wit, parody, and irony were his weapons of choice, his medium for escapism and amusement. The outlandish dress style in which he brandished Lasca and the Creeper, he applied for his own persona. His personal garments, Coleman notes, became the frequent topic of New York socialites' gossip:

> Going beyond what was the „latest word' in fashion, it became his habit to attire himself in a manner that would leave his viewers wordless. He appeared at parties dressed in red and gold oriental robes and customarily wore shirts and ties of bright colors that clashed violently. During the Twenties, these idiosyncrasies of dress were viewed as an expression of the iconoclasm of the times, but for Van Vechten it was a matter of personal taste. (1998: 73)

Aestheticism brought out the Carl Van Vechten persona, one whose relationship to sincerity construed the paradox of the modernist artist. One the one hand, the aesthete is sincere, true to his exclusively aesthetic existence; on the other hand, such a relationship to the own self deviates from the classic association between an unmediated correspondence between the self's personality and his public self.

In relation to Van Vechten's act of passing (a form of identity that is sincere with his persona), what the paradox provides the aesthete with is a sort of poetic license to act according to any type of sincerity he desires. The jazz subculture of excessive sexuality and exoticism is sincere from an aestheticist point of view, that is, it is legitimate from a modernist conception of art. In defense of his novel, however, Van Vechten shifts to the more traditional form of sincerity. He mentioned several times after the appearance of *Nigger Heaven* that the black upper class, like white upper society, held no interest for him. In regards to his characters, he wrote in his journal that "I wrote about them exactly as if they were white" (Qtd. Helbling 1976: 45).[22] Sincerity here is no longer one based on aesthetic standards or on the persona, but on the self of the individual towards a reality. Huggins argues that Van Vechten's efforts to convince

[22] This remark closely resembles the famous passage from Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, in which Marlow recounts that he looked at the natives "as you would on any human being" (Conrad 1999: 69), and which was interpreted by Chinua Achebe (1990) to be highly charged with racism.

others (and perhaps also himself) are insincere in that the writer's fixation with primitivism cannot be overlooked: "Try as he might to illustrate that Negroes were much like other people," Huggins says, "Van Vechten's belief in their essential primitivism makes him prove something else. . . . Had he thought Negroes were like white people, he would not have adopted Harlem the way he did" (2007: 111).

Thus the truth that Van Vechten asks of Negro writers in the symposium is not one that he requires of himself. The chameleonic qualities of being an insider and outsider, an aesthete and a regular individual, in his view and in those of his supporters, manage to endow him with the right to authorship. There is no hubris in his part, neither as a persona nor as an individual, precisely because such shifting of his sincerity allows him to get away with his statements and his mystifying methods. His characters, however, are not free to exercise a choice in their sincerity: Mary and Byron are tragic figures because they fail to be authentic to their primitiveness, while Lasca and the Creeper stand as the successful, authentic representatives of the race. The jazz and the blues subculture, in other words, encodes the distinctiveness of negritude, and its rituals, best manifested in the Harlem cabarets, are enactments of a savagery that the Negro will tragically lose unless he gives in to his savagery or sincerely embraces it as his subject matter for his artistic sensibility.

The result was that Van Vechten played the part of a „discoverer' of the jazz subculture for whites seeking thrills and entertainment in the actual Harlem, not on the stage adapted for white audiences. This touristic fashion nourished the Van Vechten artificiality and dandyism for several years; what was sought was the genuine, exotic jazz culture untainted by white marketing or ownership. According to Elisa Glick, the Harlem publicized by *Nigger Heaven* and Van Vechten's popularity was one where "white American primitivists only saw African Americans as a form of sexualized exoticism packaged and sold as blackness" (2003: 418). Van Vechten not only performed as a guide, but was the demiurge of the Harlemania. Justin Edwards describes the uptown journeys of his acquaintances as follows:

> Men and women from Greenwhich Village sought out Van Vechten for information on the most „authentic' places to drink. Visitors from other American and European cities considered themselves privileged when Van Vechten gave them tours of Harlem at night, for he prided himself on steering tourists away from the fake glitter of the white-owned Cotton Club

> by taking them to the gay and lesbian bars which featured drag shows and unconventional sexual opportunities. (2001: 145)

Harlem, in other words, had become a commodity. It had entered the consumerist market economically controlled by the dominant class, and it had confined negritude to the category of exoticism within the bourgeois hierarchical value system.

In the advent of the twenty-year anniversary of *Nigger Heaven*, Hugh M. Gloster published an article called "The Van Vechten Vogue" in which he argued that the allegations against the novel's jazz primitiveness were unjust. He mentions works of prominent African American writers in which the music and/or negritude were subjected to the same exotic treatment, including Langston Hughes's *The Weary Blues* (1925), Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem* (1928), *Banjo* (1929) and *Gingertown* (1932), Wallace Thurman's *The Blacker the Berry* (1929) and *Infants of Spring* (1932), and Arna Bontemp's *God Sends Sunday* (1931). Gloster admits that Van Vechten made "a fetish of sex and the cabaret rather than [giving] a faithful, realistic presentation and interpretation of Harlem life" (1945: 314); however, he suggests that he was no more an exploiter of these features than the above mentioned writers, and that his novel should not undermine his contribution to racial integration and his assistance to multiple black artists. More than eighty years after the publication of *Nigger Heaven*, Van Vechten continues to provoke extremist reactions in popular culture, and those scholars fostering mixed feelings about his work are witnesses to the complexities arising to categorize him as a person and as an aesthete. While we can assert that his postulation of a color blind society was well-intended, it was nonetheless myopic; his writing exercised the same bourgeois mystification that early pro-jazz critics were carrying out. Even if, as Gloster believes, there were a number of contemporary pieces that sought identical primitive effects, it is inevitable that whiteness acts as a factor from which to pass judgment on the novel. The same could be argued about current jazz racial ownership debates, although a post-Civil Rights and post-Black Arts Movement discourse, along with the increasing participation of whites and other ethnicities in the jazz sphere also necessitate a more democratic view, one that is consistent with present-day race relations and the acknowledgement of the music as a high art founded on a tradition and

on a canon. In the next item we continue with the issue of authenticity as we examine white jazz writing in the 1940s and the 1950s.

2.5. WHITE NEGROES AND JAZZ HIPSTERS: FROM MEZZ MEZZROW'S *REALLY THE BLUES* TO JOHN CLELLON HOLMES'S *THE HORN*

It is unlikely that the white Harlemaniacs that toured uptown during the late 1920s and 1930s ever imagined how the New York jazz scenario would evolve musically and symbolically in just a few years, and how it would topple the foundations of their own middle-class values by providing a new aesthetic model. The Beat Generation of Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs, Gregory Corso, John Clellon Holmes, Herbert Huncke, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and their most legendary muse, Neal Cassady, popularized a new countercultural vision through which to redefine black-white relations. The Beats distanced themselves from the bourgeois aestheticism and its highbrow condescendence but nonetheless retained some of its aspects. Regarding their relationship to jazz, Leonard (1987) classified them within the tribal category of followers. Their distinction from other types belonging to the same category, in which he included critics, aficionados (where he annexed Van Vechten), and hipsters, was mostly based on their obsession with literature and their behavioral patterns of nonconformity. Whereas for some critics the separation between hipsters and Beats is vague, according to Leonard the Beats' dramatizing of the postwar counterculture through publicity stunts and implosion of everyday routines places them in a different group altogether. "Unlike the hipsters, who worked their hustles more or less furtively," Leonard argues, "the beats delighted in calling attention to their behavior, thumbing their noses at rectitude and authority in ways that made news" (1987: 159). This in-your-face attitude that scandalized the American establishment and social conservatism of the 1950s carried the bebop of Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Bud Powell, and Thelonius Monk as its soundtrack.

That the Beat Generation was instrumental in shaping the shaman-like status of bop soloists through their highly ritualized poetry readings and narratives is a distinction that has been acknowledged time and again. But although postcolonial criticism has refrained from discrediting their impact on the mainstream through their use of black aesthetic codes, it has increasingly questioned their motives and their rights to appropriate them (that is, their authorship over such material) as much as their choices in narrative strategies. Peter Townsend (2000) and Jon Panish (1997) figure as recent critics to the Beats' jazz writing. Panish's more poignant study, particularly,

deconstructs Beat narrative to expose its inherent characterization of jazz musicians as instinctual and primitive creatures, an undermining of musicianship that echoes early jazz criticism, and confronts the masked supremacy underlying narrative structure and content. From a milder perspective, Townsend describes the Beat subjectivity as one that led to the reinforcement of some micro-myths and caused additional ones to emerge and solidify as part of the jazz writing canon. Unsurprisingly, such views have paved the way for the publication of pieces in unyielding disagreement, where Beat literature is defended for its racial and aesthetic democratic principles. Most notably, Preston Whaley Jr. (2004) refutes accusations of jazz primitiveness on the grounds that the Beats' portrayal of musicians and performances should be interpreted through the prism of Eastern spirituality, for the influence of Buddhism and Zen, which tends to be overlooked by jazz-based critics, provides an analytical angle that evades racist assumptions.

In this section, I examine the mythopoeic strategies belonging to the white Negro phenomenon of the counterculture to evaluate the extent to which Barthean mystification remains operative. In order to do so, I pick up on the criticism offered by postcolonial scholars. Because much has already been said about black primitivism in Beat writing, I focus mainly on the ongoing issue about Whyton's three „A's in jazz. In this way, we may better address the aesthetic frictions arising from a group of writers that allegedly wrote from the same existential „nowhereness' of the „other,' as opposed to the favorable position in which socialite aesthetes like Van Vechten found themselves in. I will begin with an overview of what could be considered as the literary antecedent to Beat jazz writing, Mezz Mezzrow's autobiography *Really the Blues* (1946). Co-written by Bernard Wolfe, the narrative stands as one of the most colorful accounts of the jazz scenario of over two decades, despite the fact that Mezzrow was better known for his skills and reliability as a drug dealer than for his talent as a clarinet player. *Really the Blues* presents a Jew's crossing of the racial barrier and enmeshment into the jazz underground of hipsters, bohemians and drug dealers. Its illustration of the linguistic subculture dynamically recreated in jazz circles, as well as Mezzrow's insubordination to white supremacy, foreshadow Beat discourse and their provocative rebelliousness.

For Townsend and Panish, it is especially Kerouac who bears the cross of the Beats' racial controversy, and it is excerpts from *On the Road* (1957) or *The*

Subterraneans (1958) which provide the most transparent evidence to support allegations of primitivism and racial stereotyping. Although I will briefly take Kerouac into account, for this section, however, my main material for analysis will be John Clellon Holmes's *The Horn* (1958), a novel which has been overshadowed by what is considered Holmes's masterpiece, *Go* (1952). The reason for choosing *The Horn* as subject matter, aside from the fact that it classifies as a jazz novel both thematically and structurally (at least that was Holmes's intention), is that contrary to Kerouac's writing, it presents African American characters as its protagonists. Kerouac's black jazz characters tend to appear solely on stage performances, where the singer or soloist takes on the form of a prophet, but which are usually meant to enhance the appeal of the Neal Cassady fictional persona. No sooner is the performance over that the musician takes his leave, his presence remaining in the highly hedonistic and vital spirit of the white hipster character. *The Horn*, however, revolves around the onstage and offstage jazz life of its characters, and white hipsters, although not deprived of symbolism, are intended to supply them with cathartic envisioning, not the other way around. It is precisely what translates as Holmes's efforts to present the humanistic side of black musicianship which makes the novel a bit more slippery in interpretative terms. By recuperating Panish's suggestions about the novel, I make an in-depth analysis of the strategies employed by Holmes to appropriate the music, strategies which are attempts to sustain the credibility of authority.

2.5.1. Mezzrow and the Colonization of Blackness

When it comes to jazz, Beatnick aesthetics should not be reduced to mere reactionary stances against postwar conservatism and the Second Red Scare.[23] Indeed, the temperament resulting from the Cold War ideology and the trauma of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombings, added to the 1940s baby boom and the rapidly growing

[23] The First Red Scare (1919-1920) and the Second Red Scare (1947-1957) refer to the key periods in the anticommunist paranoia that spread throughout the United States, where left-wing sympathizers were investigated under the charges of crime and conspiracy. The Second Red Scare immersed the country in the cleansing politics practiced by the House Un-American Activities Commission (HUAC) and Senator Joseph McCarthy.

market economy, are pivotal elements for the understanding of the sense of dissociation sought and articulated by Beat writers. However, this social liminality and the indulgent appraisal of the opportunities it provided can be found in the jazz subculture of the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. Van Vechten and the Harlemaniacs had, from the ivory tower of the aesthete, set the trend of mingling with the liminal subculture. But Euro American non-conformism also came in the form of the dissident hipster. Such was the story collected by Milton „Mezz' Mezzrow in his autobiography. Born to a middle-class Jewish family in Chicago in 1899, Mezzrow rejected his cultural heritage as much as his economic background already in his teens. By the age of sixteen he had been sent to Pontiac, a reform school, where his initiation into jazz began. What followed thereafter was a life in the margins of society and the law, a life where New Orleans jazz set the rhythm to his stride to the Western territory and back, and from Chicago to Harlem. He shoulders with Al Capone and with many of jazz's greatest names, including Louis Armstrong, Joe Oliver, Sidney Bechet, Bix Beiderbecke, Gene Krupa, Baby Dodds, and Hugues Panassié. Mezzrow's depiction of the „on the road' experience and his rich gallery of faces from different racial backgrounds, yet all devoted to the „brotherhood' of the jazz underground, are the foundational core of the Beats' later celebration of the American melting pot, where geography meets the racial diversity that populates the fringes of sociopolitical margins.

It is significant that Mezzrow, a New Orleans jazz advocate against the commercialism of swing, blends issues of racial purity with those of musical immaculacy. When commenting on the popular white jazz sensations of the time, including Al Jolson, Sophie Tucker, and Eddie Cantor, Mezzrow negates the substantiality of the white-Jewish racial construct:

> Being a Jew didn't mean a thing to me. Around the poolroom I defended the guys I thought were my real brothers, the colored musicians who made music that sent me, not a lot of the beat-up old hamfats who sang and played a commercial excuse for the real thing. I never could dig the phony idea of a race – if we were a „race' – sticking together all the way, even when it meant turning your back on what was good or bad. (1964: 51)

Mezzrow's associations between Jewishness, commercialism, swing, conformity, and being „square' were not uncommon at a time when defenders of the „true' jazz (that is, the New Orleans style) vocalized, as we have seen, their resentment against the

whitening of the black music idiom. The Jewishness represented, for example, by the symphonic jazz of George Gershwin, held no appeal for Mezzrow, who found in negritude the authenticity that his own background lacked. Mezzrow prided himself in having received his education outside conventional institutions: he significantly begins the book with the following remark: "Music school? Are you kidding? I learned to play the sax in Pontiac Reformatory (1964: 13). His acceptance as a street-smart youth came with his command of the jazz argot. In his views, such credentials allowed him to cross the color line. Like other New Orleans purists, he was sensitive about the way in which whiteness inoculated black language with its pedantic, or square, or supremacist rhetoric. He describes the downfall of his friendship with his sister after she insistently corrected Bessie Smith's grammar, and deeply resents Western high art requirements of written scores: "Written music is like handcuffs," he states, "and so is the pendulum in white-tie-and-tails up on the conductor's stand. Symphony means slavery in any jazzman's dictionary. Jazz and freedom are synonymous" (Mezzrow and Wolfe 1964: 112). In accordance with dismissing racial integration (because such an absorption would lead to the assimilation of white American values and therefore to the disappearance of black culture), so does Mezzrow revoke the high art / entertainment binarism altogether, as he conceives it as a tool to subdue the racial „other.'

Above all, Mezzrow's apprenticeship of the jazz lingo of codified speech patterns granted him membership to the subculture and distinguished him from other pro-jazz advocates. Van Vechten had probably been one of the pioneers in collecting the vocabulary of the jazz cabarets. The glossary at the end of *Nigger Heaven*, however, was more a reflection of aestheticism than it was an insight into black jargon. The meaningless tautologies skipping from one term to another were more likely attempts to engage readers in a provocative game than they were intended to elucidate the richness and variety of the dialect. Like Van Vechten, Mezzrow provides a glossary at the end of *Really the Blues*. His definitions, however, are clear and accurate; even part of a chapter is dedicated to faithfully reproducing a street conversation (a translation into „correct' English is afterwards given). Mezzrow's reflections on jazz language are fiercely convincing of his status as an insider, especially because of his moral involvement in protecting its integrity. The dialect's perpetual drive towards inventiveness and creativity and its use of parody and pastiche are often described by Mezzrow, and these passages were later used by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. to provide a model for Signifyin(g)

Theory. We will attend to the intricacies and the discursive strategies involved in jazz rhetoric when we consider Gates's use of myth, but for now it is pivotal to point out that Mezzrow's expertise on the vocabulary and on the dynamics of the discourse broke with the way that Van Vechten had presented the language of the jazz subculture to white readers.[24] More importantly for our present case as well is the fact that although articulated in different terms, Mezzrow's awareness of the manner by which white linguistic codes colonize the black dialect resembles the speech patterns of the Barthean myth. Note how in the following excerpt Mezzrow describes the method by which jazz slang lost its novelty:

> When we talked about a musician who played hot, we would say he could swing or he couldn't swing, meaning what kind of effect did he have on the band. This word was cooked up after the unhip public took over the expression ‚hot' and made it corny by getting up in front of a band and snapping their fingers in a childish way, yelling "Get hot! Yeah, man, get hot!" . . . That happened all the time, and it got us embarrassed and irritated all at once. . . . That's the reason we hot musicians are always making up new lingo for ourselves. Whenever the outsiders pick up the jazzman's colloquialisms they kick them around until the words lose all their real fresh meaning. Just look at what's happened to the word ‚swing' . . . Now the term is slapped on any corn you want to sell to the unsuspecting public. It's a gaudy label to plaster on an inferior, adulterated product. (1964: 125-126)

Mezzrow suggests that the process whereby jazz language is deprived of its original meaning (a meaning that bears the historical and cultural significance of the music) is one where the ‚squares' (a nomenclature that alludes to the dominating culture) infect the terms with their ideology. This infection is produced through an exploitation that first occurs through a pathetic display of enthusiasm from the audience in which, momentarily, the ‚squares' attempt to authenticate their insight into the jazz subculture.

[24] It should be pointed out, nonetheless, that although Mezzrow was the first white musician to deeply philosophize about the jazz dialect, other publications did set a precedent. Mezzrow's observations came after Louis Armstrong had made the following comment in his 1936 autobiography, *Swing that Music*, which also included a glossary: "There are more than four hundred words used among swing musicians that no one else would understand. They have a language of their own" (1993: 77). Rick McRae (2001) points out that in the 1930s and 1940s a number of publications undertook the dictionary-like role of translating the meaning and usages of the black and white hipster lingo, a trend that would begin its decadence in the mid-1950s despite the Beats' fascination with the slang.

This behavior not only irritates Mezzrow and other musicians because of the ridiculousness involved, but also because it disrespects black culture in its premise that linguistic codes can be successfully deciphered and used by anyone. Because the terms in themselves lack for the „squares' a full, rich meaning, it is easier for the distortion to function. In other words, what Mezzrow describes is the development of bourgeois mystification through an initial stage of language deformation.

Consequential to this is the deprivation of meaning and history from the concepts associated to the terms (jazz and its musicians), producing, in the final, drastic stage, a capitalist commodity. Jazz terms become labels for marketing goods; cultural miscegenation results in the subdual of black history and meaning to produce profits, the ultimate aim of the bourgeoisie. Not only has the cultural „other' been categorized within the hierarchy, but moreover, it's most vital tool, language, is emptied and robbed for the benefit of consumerism. Jazz terminology is utilized as a force to create a commodity fetish: the word „swing,' for instance, infuses upon the marketed product the trendy, hipster „power' to which the "unsuspecting" consumer is attracted to.[25] In Mezzrow's view, linguistic (and by extension, cultural) hybridism is only a means to further push the racial „other' to the lowest position of the social scale, whilst draining it of its original, self-liberating qualities. Mezzrow was one of the first jazz insiders to articulate his distress about the colonization of the musicians' language. Decades later, Leonard would establish this infectious pattern as a commonality inevitable to the popularity of jazz. In his article "The Jazzman's Verbal Usage," he states that "the novelty of [jazz's] argot served to enhance its demimondial appeal. And its words spread to the outside world in a pattern of imitation and replacement analogous to that of fashion in dress" (Leonard 1986: 151). Because the insulation of language is an impossible task, the only solution to protect the integrity of the jazz subculture is to organically reinvent new terms and expressions. In time, these terms will also be appropriated by the dominating culture; but by then a fresh vocabulary will have been developed.

[25] The term 'swing,' particularly, had profound commercial effects at the end of the 1930s. As Joachim Berendt points out in his acclaimed history of jazz, by the end of the decade, "la palabra 'swing' fue la etiqueta de éxito para toda clase de productos que debían venderse bien: figuritas de porcelana, cigarrillos, prendas de vestir femenina" (2005: 43).

Jazz linguistic codes, therefore, represent two basic attitudes of empowerment: on the one hand, they are the magical essence that is to be adequately acquired by those who desire to integrate within the subculture. This essence is to be mastered efficiently and appropriately: terms, expressions and attitudes must be correctly applied in specific given contexts, adapting intonation, signification (including ironic or parodying effects), spontaneity, coherence and cohesiveness to the situation. Those who fail to be in command of the codes do so because of their own incompetence and incapability of understanding and assimilating the original meaning and intentionality of the dialect. As part of the rite of passage, the jazz argot emerges as a separatist force: identity may be acquired in one of two categories: the hip or the unhip, the underdog or the „square,' the existentialist or the bourgeois. Secondly, such dynamic qualities symbolize the agency of the oppressed group and its resistance to the static, frozen, a-historicized nature with which the hegemony wraps the entirety of signs associated to the subculture. The cycles of linguistic reinvention struggle to push away from the magnetic field of the dominant group's speech devices. The effort to protect the identity shared by the members is a strive for insulation, and it is precisely this which enables the cross-racial relation to balance itself as much as it can to one of dialectics, and not one of total dispossession. The continuous creativity inherent to jazz's organic language, in other words, appears as a means from which to escape the fulminating qualities of mystification. As myth devours sign after sign, so does the oppressed keep producing new ones, providing a pretext for myth to keep functioning but at the same time always keeping one step ahead of it, eluding it and suggesting that despite the dominating culture's weaponry of speech, it will never conquer its creative core.

In this way, *Really the Blues* stands as a *Bildungsroman* where Mezzrow confronts his own methods of acculturation. He views his whiteness and Jewishness as a stigma, a syndrome of the disease spread by the hegemony. He attacks imitation of black forms but redeems himself through a self-portrait of one who has mastered the idiomatic codes. Assertive as he may be regarding the genius of the black race and the division between the hip and the unhip, there remain, however, issues about the phenomenon of passing that would forever haunt Mezzrow, as there now and again emerges some sign to remind him that he is biologically white. The confrontation between biology and culture is essential to understand the method by which universality is finally claimed. Jeffery Melnick argues that Mezzrow's case is one of a "sick white

Negro" because of the paradoxes that it presents: firstly, Mezzrow's assimilation of negritude often extends beyond the cultural level, as he suggests that his physical attributes slowly developed black features. He believes in the racial inheritance of aesthetic qualities and behavioral patterns to the extent that he takes pride in moments when whites take him for black, including women he hangs out with and the judge who places him under arrest for possession of marihuana. As Melnick notes:

> Mezzrow's belief that he had come to look physically „Black' is a definitive act of one-upmanship which makes an absurd final comment on white Negroism as a voluntary stance. After marrying an African American woman and living in Harlem for so many years, Mezzrow wanted to believe that a crucial act of transubstantiation had taken place whereby desire changed into matter and nearness into sameness. (2001: 137-138)

Mezzrow's shifts from the advocacy of racial heritage to defending his own passing through the mastering of the black jazz language are signs of a confrontation between how things are and how the subject wishes them to be. His boasting of being an insider of the true, pure New Orleans jazz circles vaporizes in a number of instances. His admitting to the limits to acculturation is sincere, and it reveals his underlying belief that it is destiny's depriving him of the race that he admires where the origin of his complex can be found. Commenting on why he refused to play in colored bands in Harlem, Mezzrow claims that "the race made me feel inferior, started me thinking that maybe I wasn't worth beans as a musician or any kind of artist, in spite of all my big ideas" (1964: 204). He goes on to admit that his control of the idiom is neither as perfect nor as natural as it is for blacks: "The tremendous inventiveness, the spur-of-the-moment creativeness that I saw gushing out in all aspects of Harlem life . . . made me doubt if I was even in the running with those boys" (1964: 204). Melnick argues that these limits are finally resolved in yet another paradox. In order to come to terms with his longing to be black, culturally and biologically, Mezzrow seeks authenticity by regarding jazz and the blues as universal in the category of class, not on race. After all his celebrating of the black race, Mezzrow comes to the conclusion that the blues idiom, bred in the poverty of Negro culture, is shared and understood by every member of an oppressed group, regardless of race: "For Mezzrow (in this aspect of his self-making anyway), true success at white Negroism comes only with the total erasure of racial difference – which is to say the elimination of those conditions which made his striking

performance possible in the first place" (Melnick 2001: 138). Mezzrow particularly dramatizes this belief in the closing chapter, set during his imprisonment in Hart's Island jail in the early 1940s. One day, as he leads the prison's mixed band through a march, they pass in front of the all-colored Ninth Division strenuously working outdoors in the heat of the scorching sun. "I decided to break all the chains off me and let myself go" (1964: 269), Mezzrow begins. The feeling of transcendence spreads to the rest of the black and white players, who unite with the Ninth Division in their suffering:

> The whole band was suddenly marching and swaying to a new rhythm. And every beat Frankie pounded on his drums was in perfect time with every variation somebody picked out on my clarinet, and my clarinet and the trumpet melted together in one gigantic harmonic orgasm and my fingers ran every whichaway, and the fellows in the Ninth Division began to grin and stomp and shout. "Blow it Mezz!" they yelled. "Yeah, I hear you!" "Get away, poppa!" "Put me in the alley!" (1964: 269)

It is in this cathartic moment when the color-blind language of the oppressed comes together, gathering its children. For Mezzrow, the transcendence is one that involves returning to the genesis, the roots of the blues idiom. Time and the American geography dissolve into one another in the same way that racial lines are erased to give birth to a new identity: "All of the sudden, you know who I was? I was Jimmy Noone and Johnny Dodds and Sidney Bechet, swinging down Rampart Street and Perdido Street, down through Storyville . . . I was home. I was solid home" (Mezzrow and Wolfe 1964: 270).

2.5.2. Holmes and the Mystification of the Jazz Hero Monomyth

A decade after the publication of *Really the Blues*, the Beat Generation articulated similar concerns and motifs in their jazz writing. Authenticity and identification with the oppressed, and the exploration of the American territory as an aesthetic possibility remained pivotal issues for the portrayal of jazz musicians and performances. Jazz itself, however, had changed drastically, and the 1940s saw the decline of the Swing Era and the surge of the short-lived school of bop. Inspired by earlier soloists such as Art Tatum, Earl Hines, Lester Young, and Coleman Hawkins,

the bop generation of Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Kenny Clarke and Bud Powell burst into the scene to offer the public a new outtake on the music. The nervous, frenetic impulse that would characterize the virtuosity of the bop soloists had been brought from the South and from the Midwest to Harlem, and clubs such as Minton's Playhouse and Clark Monroe's Uptown House became the creative nucleuses. Eric Lott argues that bebop must necessarily be interpreted as "intimately if indirectly related to the militancy of its moment" (1995: 246). Indeed, throughout the 1940s, several incidences of a sociopolitical nature marked the ascendancy of the zoot-suit militant. Among other crises, the 1941 strike against Ford, the increase in wages for black workers in some industries, the empowerment of the NAACP, and the growing participation of black soldiers overseas were laying the foundation for the Civil Rights era. Lott points out that it was mostly the black officers' fight against fascism abroad which generated the tumultuous urban atmosphere of revolts and insurrections. The home of these soldiers was one where segregation and racism were protected and sustained by institutional powers, and so it became the motto for many soldiers to fight in the name of "the „Double V' – victory abroad and victory at home" (Lott 1995: 244). In the summer of 1943, Harlem became the hotspot of civil unrest when a white policeman shot a black soldier in a tussle with a black woman. The irony of the situation was too much to bear, and civilians hit the streets violently, damaging properties and looting in complaint for the soldier who had put his life in danger to protect American freedom and democracy abroad. Bebop expressed its political dissatisfaction through the unique style of its soloists, where velocity, virtuosity and rhythms mirrored these racial revolts and aesthetically contested the post-World War II establishment and economic booming. "Every instrument," Lott says, "became immediately more mobile, everything *moved*" (1995: 248).

Beat writers Kerouac and Holmes acutely amplified Mezzrow's sense of displacement and cultural liminality through the bop idiom. The movement inherent to the sound of soloists colored the impulsive swiftness with which their characters travelled from East to West, from South to North, and back. The American territory and its peoples were material for research and the medium through which to conceive the panaceas of the self. Kerouac's Whitmanesque and Wolfean endeavor to write *the* great American novel required hipster characters as much as it did a Beat author, one who mingled with all the races of the melting pot. As Norman Mailer described in his essay

"The White Negro" (1957), the hipster reacts to the threat of an instant death (by atomic bomb) or a slow death (through a conventional, conformist existence) by living on the verge of annihilation. For Mezzrow, hipsters, and Beats, the romanticism through which such a lifestyle could be carried out found its muse in the Negro and his art: "It is no accident that the source of Hip is the Negro for he has been living on the margin between totalitarianism and democracy for two centuries" (1992: 340), Mailer asserts. It is in this act of imitation where critics have found tinges of racism, for it is an imitation based once again on appropriation and deprivation of history. As I mentioned earlier, Kerouac has most notably been the object of criticism for his very personal aesthetic treatment of the jazz musician, where spontaneity, instinct, and the improvisational language he uses have been conceived as signs of primitivist portrayals.[26] John Clellon

[26] Jazz passages in *On the Road* and *The Subterraneans* have elicited diametrically opposed interpretations particularly on the grounds of the shamanic symbolism of the musician portrayed and the language used by the white hipsters among the audience. At the heart of such divorced arguments is the questioning of Kerouac's intentions through his portrayals. Townsend is critical about the fact that "Kerouac's biographers have been relatively uninterested in jazz, and have applied to it a conception derived partly from popular myth and partly from Kerouac's work itself" (2000: 117). As a result, they have undermined the implications of what Townsend describes as Kerouac's harmful attempts at empathizing with the oppressed race. In *On the Road*, for example, Sal wanders through the Denver colored section looking for Dean and reflects on his own unfortunate circumstance as a white American: "I walked . . . wishing I were a Negro, feeling that the best the white world had offered was not enough ecstasy for me, not enough life, joy, kicks, darkness, music, not enough night" (Kerouac 2003: 179-180). Sal is dispirited by the confirmation that "I was only myself . . . wishing I could exchange worlds with the happy, true-hearted, ecstatic Negroes of America" (Kerouac 2003: 180). What the bop sessions represent in the novel is Dean's ability to transcend the same racial boundaries that inspire a self-conscious complex in Sal. As the anointed saint, Dean identifies with the shaman-like soloist and in return the soloist acknowledges him as an insider by engaging him within the characteristically black ritual of competition: "Dean was in a trance. The tenorman's eyes were fixed straight on him; he had a madman who not only understood but cared and wanted to understand more and much more than there was, and they began dueling for this" (Kerouac 2003: 180). The harmfulness of such treatments, in Townsend's view, lies in the fact that all these descriptions are self-gratifying, that is, they are revelatory of the symbolic role of Sal and Dean as the representative individuals of the American white hipster. The Negro is but an aesthetic technique, a medium through which to allude to the absorbing qualities of the white hipster. By assuming that a white hipster longs to be part of the black community (Sal) and by

Holmes's *The Horn*, however, appears to evade primitivist assumptions a little bit more because of the in-depth characterization of its black characters as subject matter with a notable intent to humanize them. Although Kerouac's writing resembles much more deeply the spontaneous language of *Really the Blues*, Holmes's narrating of jazz rituals and recurrent use of certain motifs echo Mezzrow's observations on the significance of these practices and their aesthetic implications.

The controversy surrounding the Beats' usage of jazz motifs goes deeper than the primitivist myth, which is but a part of the larger issue involved. Once again, the concern with authenticity, authority, and authorship is the racial barrier from which subsequent allegations of primitivism and racism are generated. According to Panish, both Kerouac and Holmes coincide in what he regards as the major failure in Euro American depiction of jazz: the emphasis on the individualistic at the expense of the sense of a shared cultural history and community, and the exclusive focus on the stage as setting. Bop's launching of the soloist as the improvising ringleader of the musical piece provided the Beats with a pretext to articulate the American romanticist ideal of the self-made man within the jazz aesthetic code, and by indulging in such personifications, Panish suggests, they overlooked the specific circumstances of the African American historical and artistic context:

> Predictably, Euro American writers describing the process of improvisational creation focus almost exclusively on what is happening on the stage – that is, the *appearance* of the performers and performances. This focus takes different forms – the technical virtuosity of the performers, the apparent „competition' between players, or the personal connections among

---

assuming that the white saint (Dean) can actually achieve this naturally, Kerouac dismisses the concrete historical politics of the oppressed.

Other critics, however, claim that postcolonial criticism (including New Jazz Studies) tend to disregard Kerouac's principal literary influences, and hence turn to biased convictions that his descriptions of African American individuals are based on modern minstrel portrayals of the happy, unassuming race. Ann Charters (2003) suggests that the refusal to understand *On the Road* as a religious book contradicts Kerouac's authorial intent. In a similar line, Christopher Gair states that these critics have overlooked Kerouac's "apprenticeship" and "indebtedness to Transcendentalism's emphasis on spontaneity" (2008: 93), and Preston Whaley notes that "the caricature of primitivism" is consequential to critics' omission of the fact that the beat aesthetic "conforms itself to Eastern-derived notions of mental concentration and esteem for creativity in the moment" (2004: 34).

> the musicians. Perhaps this emphasis comes from the Euro American writer's great need to prove his connection with and mastery of the subcultural idiom. That is, claiming a musical expertise substitutes for being able (or at least, *feeling* able) to link oneself with the experience of racism or the development of African American culture. (Panish 1997: 106)

Let us turn to examine *The Horn* to consider these allegations. Set on a Monday in the postwar New York, the novel revolves around a central character, Edgar Pool, „The Horn,' from the morning after his „dethronement' until his death that very night. As if imitating the bebop structure of soloing, the novel is divided into sequences of riffs, in which we follow Edgar on a Manhattan odyssey through the present, and choruses, where we follow the flashbacks of a number of characters on how they met and were changed by Edgar. Opening the narrative are Walden Blue's recollections as he wakes up in his apartment the afternoon after having beat Edgar in a cutting contest.[27] Walden ponders the idea that he has begun a new life, that the competition has made him a new man, a heroic figure in jazz. Recalling the past night, however, he is taken by the feeling that the self-destructive Edgar is probably on the verge of suicide, for his „death' at the bandstand in Blanton's (a fictionalized version of Minton's) can only conduce to an actual annihilation of the self. Alarmed, Walden journeys through New York in search of Edgar and turns to other musicians for information on his possible whereabouts.

Wing Redburn is the next character to be given a chorus. In a Freudian twist, he recalls the admiration he had once felt for Edgar and the youthful impulse to please him musically. As a young musician of the new bop wave (a school that Edgar is credited for envisioning and initiating), Wing cannot handle the frustration of not earning the respect and acknowledgement that he desires from „The Horn.' What he perceives as indifference on his mentor's part leads him to abandon his band and head for the Louisiana territory. Not having reached his final destination, New Orleans, the source of jazz, he becomes sexually entangled with a woman, Fay Lee, who spiritually heals him

[27] Cutting contests are jazz-based ritual practices of threshold crossing through competing solo performances. Debra DeSalvo defines cutting as "a jam session during which players competed for gigs, respect, and acclaim by trying to blow each other off the stage. The applause of the audience was the barometer used to grade the players and choose the winners" (2006: 56). Although the competition usually involves aggressive interplay, contests may also be performed on friendlier, laid-back terms.

by conjuring images and sounds of the deep, underlying meaning of the blues, a meaning that Wing had somehow forgotten. Believing to have accomplished his task and acquired his boon, he returns to New York to become a studio musician. In the present, he comes to the realization that "free of Edgar, now" he is "able to care" (J.C. Holmes 1980: 48) and look for him.[28]

The third chorus is Junius Priest's, a piano player who lives with his mother. Edgar phones him urgently asking him for money to buy a fare to return to Kansas City, where he can collect himself after a period of woodshedding.[29] Like Wing, Junius had once idolized Edgar. His reverence for him was so profound that years back, in Los Angeles, he had made "no attempt to approach him" (64), but just listened to him, trying to reproduce in his piano what he was doing on his saxophone. But unlike Wing, Junius is aware that he is not free of Edgar, and that his self-destructive ways will only drag him to his own downfall. Junius hangs up the phone, well aware that it is his only chance for self-preservation.

The next chorus is voiced by Geordie Dickson, Edgar's former lover and now an acclaimed vocalist. Geordie had been in the audience during the cutting session of the previous night and after receiving a visit from Edgar, asking her for money, her fear of his downfall is confirmed. In her apartment, she ruminates about the years with Edgar, how he had taken her away from a Charleston ginmill and made a singer out of her, how the heroin and cocaine had blurred more than a decade of gigging from coast to coast, and how, in the end, despite her unconditional love and passion for him, she had to let him go to survive.

Following is the chorus of the trumpet player Curny. Curny, Wing and Junius had all been faithful followers and imitators of „The Horn' once, when he first brought to the world the Word of bop. The chapter is first constructed around the hearsay on

[28] Hereafter all citations from *The Horn* will be indicated solely through page number.

[29] The term 'woodshedding' refers in jazz to a musician's temporary period of isolation devoted to the practice and perfection of his own technique and sound. The etymology probably derives from the musician's tendency to exercise his sound far from the earshot of other musicians and his own family, yet close to home, in his woodshed. Max A. Brandt, however, has pointed out that 'woodshedding' is also used in barbershop terminology to indicate "the process of refining an oral arrangement of a particular song" through "spontaneous harmonic improvisation, without the help of prescribed arrangements" (1995: 34).

Curny's satirical and ironic humor and antics as a number of musicians and their manager wait for him for a rehearsal. Curny finally arrives with Edgar, to whom he has promised to lend some money after the rehearsal. What follows is a scene built on increasing tension: as the band attempts to practice the number, Edgar, drunk and high on Benzedrine, keeps interrupting with suggestions and corrections. It is not long before Curny runs out of patience; insulted by Edgar's intrusions in his arrangements and angered by the waste of time, he scorns his friend. Edgar takes this as a sign of disrespect and leaves the room, though not before yelling at Curny that he does not want his money, that he has already pawned his horn and he almost has enough to get him where he wants.

As Wing and Walden continue their search, they turn to Metro Myland for help. As „Myland' indicates, Metro ran away from the St. Louis poverty as a child, hoboing train rides and crisscrossing the country. It was in a freight train where he had first met Edgar. Their fate was sealed when, first Edgar and then Metro, had sexual intercourse with the same white girl on the train car. They become friends and Edgar takes him to Kansas City with his family. It is here that Edgar decides to become a musician and he purchases a horn. At the time, Kansas City is emerging as the nucleus of a new jazz sound and it inspires Edgar to progress. But one night on the bandstand, Edgar's amateurishness brings him humility: under the impotent gaze of Metro, Edgar struggles to prove himself by playing the only song he knows, "Comin' Virginia," to the rhythm and changes of another tune. Unable to face his embarrassment and his father's predicaments, Edgar abandons Kansas City, leaving his horn behind for Metro, with a note saying "I get me another ones somewhere . . . But don't you ever hock it. Give it to someone first" (186).

Intersecting these choruses are the riffs, in which we follow Edgar (and the young Cleo, a pianist), from morning to nightfall as he scavenges the city for money to buy his fare to Kansas City. Cleo has been following Edgar ever since the cutting session for fear that he might hurt himself. As Edgar maniacally raves about the good old days and the good old ways and tragically disparages the inadequacy of the younger generations to understand such codes, both characters get increasingly drunk. Edgar's feelings for Walden are ambiguous: on the one hand he resents having been cut in, claiming that that a few years ago such an audacity was disrespectful, but he finds himself having to accept that Walden really overpowered him. In the end, Edgar is

given two choruses for his soliloquy. The only way he can get the rest of the money is by playing alongside Cleo and his band in the Go Hole. The first set turns out to be disastrous: Cleo, drunk, falls from his stool, another musician refuses to play with him, and yet another musician walks out before the end of the set. Edgar is the object of ridicule, a grotesque shadow of what he once was. He steps out of the Hole for the interlude, and, running into Geordie and Curny's white manager, he asks them for help, as he feels his health is faltering. Both misunderstand him and he returns enraged to the Hole for the second set, only to find that the band has started without him, and that not only are they playing brilliantly, but Walden is up there, imitating note for note one of Edgar's most legendary solos. As he makes his way to join them, Wing stops him, and he collapses. He is taken to the kitchen and given the prognosis of a stomach hemorrhage. Under the gaze of a torn-down Geordie, he calls for his horn and reaches in his pocket for a piece of paper. The paper flutters from his fingers as he violently jerks his head on the marble for one last time. The coda belongs to Cleo, who picks up the piece of paper with the name and address of the broker at the pawnshop. Despite what appeared to have been Edgar's last will, to retrieve the horn, Cleo, now in full understanding of what the bop idiom is about, of what it means to be black in America, crumples the paper. "We can love him now"; he thinks to himself, "Leave his symbol where it is" (243).

The summary is lengthy but necessary to understand that both the structure and the myriad of characters, the vision of cosmic time and the representation of the fullness of the American territory through the flashbacks, are aesthetic devices aiming to reach the Whitmanesque totality of the great American novel. Holmes attempts a symbolic fusion of each of the characters with a great American writer. An epigraph belonging to these romantic figures opens each chorus: Walden is associated with Henry David Thoreau, Wing „Redburn' is connected to Herman Melville, Junius „Priest' is linked to Hawthorne, Geordie „Dickinson' to Emily Dickinson, Curny, because of his parodying humor and posing as a loquacious Southern aristocrat is bound to Mark Twain, Metro „Myland' refers to the spiritual absorption of the macrocosm within the microcosm of Whitman, and finally, Edgar Pool is identified with Edgar Allan Poe. Cleo is deprived of a literary alter ego, perhaps suggesting that his innocence is yet to suffer the molding forces of the American experience. His youth is significantly noted by Edgar, who thinks of him as an unassuming boy, lacking masculine facial features. The coda

represents the moment of maturation for Cleo, the crossing of the threshold into experience. With no literary counterpart, the grave mission of carving for Edgar a place in history befalls on him as he is left to decide whether to retrieve the horn or leave it at the pawnshop. His resolution to leave it there marks the commencement of a new cycle, where beginning and end intersect, as the horn awaits for a new jazz innovator to buy it from the pawnshop, just like Edgar had once done in Kansas City.

Some of the characters are as well literary reproductions of actual jazz legends. Edgar's familial and musical connection to Kansas City recalls the birth and sonic origin of Charlie Parker as well as the place where Lester Young developed his individual sound with the Count Basie band in the 1930s. Like Young, Edgar holds "his tenor saxophone almost horizontally extended from his mouth" (8) and like Parker, he has been treated at a sanatorium and he is voraciously self-destructive (Holmes writes in the 1980 introduction that the death of Parker in 1955 provided him with the right ending for the novel, which he had begun in 1952). Like Billie Holiday, Geordie has a history in substance abuse and has lived through a sexually violent childhood. Although the relationship between Young and Holiday was never reportedly of a sexual nature, their platonic friendship, love and respect for each other is somewhat echoed by the deep but impossible longing between Edgar and Geordie for one another. Junius's introvert personality and material and social isolation from the world may be a tribute to the bop icon Thelonius Monk, who recoiled from the bop craze in the 1950s. The triumvirate of bop legends is completed with what could be interpreted as the personification of Dizzy Gillespie in the figure of Curny. Like Curny, Dizzy was known for his wit and masterful ability for parody. His antics revolved around a form of signifying where he mocked white hegemony through hyperbolized minstrelsy-like behaviors. They both wear a goatee, a stylistic trademark of the modern intellectual, and they are both theorizers in the harmonics of bop. The relationship between Dizzy and Parker was one based on a profound respect and friendship, but the seriousness with which Dizzy approached his work (for the satirical clown always reveals an intellectual underneath) frequently clashed with the cataclysmic Parker, leading to a history of on-off collaborations. The same symbolic equilibrium is maintained between Edgar and Curny:

> Though Curny was one of those garrulous, high-spirited clowns that America still occasionally produces, as if to balance out the gloomy poets (like Edgar) who walk her main-street midnights composing maledictions, he was no less perceptive of the dark side of things than the poet. (129)

The amalgamation of the symbolic potential of characters and spaces is construed within the paradigm of the hero monomyth. Edgar's journey has always been one "from the tomb of the womb to the womb of the tomb" (Joseph Campbell 1973: 12) in the world navel of America. The cutting contest between Edgar and Walden places the stage of the monomyth that detonates the inevitability of the cycle. Like Mezzrow, Holmes was familiarized with the rhetoric of signifying involved in cutting contests. Mezzrow had described them as ritualistic equivalents to verbal duels; "they're staged to see which performer can snag and cap all the others *musically*" (1964: 197). "Boasting doesn't cut any ice"; Mezzrow states, "if you think you've got something, don't waste time talking yourself up, go work and prove it" (1964: 197). It is precisely the ritualistic aspect which allowed the idiom to perfect itself, as it disciplined its practitioners: "These contests taught the musicians never to rest on their laurels, to keep on woodshedding and improving themselves" (Mezzrow and Wolfe 1964: 198). In *The Horn*, Walden's cutting of Edgar is poeticized to insert its meaning within the Edgar monomyth. Walden's victory represents the slaying of the „father,' and, in symmetry with the final scene in which Walden has taken over Edgar's second set and is blowing one his solos, so does Walden perform this first sacrifice through a perfected imitation of what the „father' had once created long ago. Because signifying is based on repetition with a signal difference (through parody of pastiche), the slaying of the „king' is performed through a ritualistic appropriation of his creation; Edgar's sound is extended, perfected and adapted to the aesthetic demands of new generations by Walden. In the midst of the contest, the tension transforms into one belonging to the archetypal pattern of stealing the „magic' and acquiring the boon from the monster / father.

> Walden looked into [Edgar's] eyes, and blew a moving phrase that once another Edgar might have blown, and was, at last, victim of the naïve core of his heart, the unthought-out belief that it musn't be Edgar's way. He looked at Edgar, loving him in all his savage, smearing mockery, battling not him but the dark side of that Black-angel soul; bringing light. (18)

It is a pattern that depends upon the initiate's skill to aesthetically overpower his „father' as much as on the emotional courage to „kill' him.

After his failure, all Edgar wants is to return to Kansas City, yet none of the characters believe him. They are convinced that he is just looking for lush money, and Edgar is fatefully forced to be present in the remaining stages of the cycle. He desperately wants to go to Kansas City to woodshed so that he can gather his strength and honor his position. But Edgar's reign has expired. As a tragic hero, his final journey is death, and it is a death that is sequentially encoded in jazz rituals. Like Frazer's King of Nemi, Edgar's impossibility to live up to his former self indicates the necessity for extermination. Despite their respect and acknowledgement of his paternal role, Walden, Junius, Geordie, and Curny, become agents in the rite of slaying. The more poignant tragedy lies in the fact that the king is usually executed at the first signs of decay; but Edgar is forced into a more grotesque extreme through the pathetic scene of his last set, and through the witnessing of Walden's final imitation of his solo, a tribute as if Edgar was already dead.

Alongside Edgar, some characters find themselves in a critical point in their own monomyths. Walden, having shed his skin as an initiate, has "for once and all, damned himself to going his way. . . . From now on he had to fight for his life and his vision, like every man" (22). The Cleo coda, as I have indicated, also reflects the rite of passage into manhood. Other characters reproduce the same paradigmatic longing for the womb (Junius withdraws from the bop society to live with his mother) that is often met with impossibility. When Holmes identifies the womb with a certain American territory, it is as if higher forces operate to keep their displaced children at bay. After Edgar's visit, Geordie considers the possibility of heading to Kansas City with him, only to realize that "it was no good to believe she could go back, much as she wanted to believe she could" (96). Returning to what had once been her loving, protecting „father' and her home in the South is antithetical to a heroine's strive for continuance and survival. Similarly, Wing recalls how he never reached New Orleans, although he was blessed with the healing powers of the „good mother' in some remote place in Louisiana:

> Then one twilight [Wing] wandered down to the river and saw [Fay Lee] sitting on the pier, dangling her legs, a small, rapt silhouette watching the lights come on in perfect solitude. . . . But then, as he crept closer, he heard her singing an absent line of blues without words, a line too simple, too

> isolated from all other music by its spontaneity to be remembered, so that the moment it dried on her moist lips he could not recall it. He stood not four feet behind her, paralyzed by the perishability and the keenness of that moment, as by an immense truth. And everything there became real to him, at last. (45)

His understanding of her nourishing and protecting message is dubious, however. As Joseph Campbell indicates, the ‚good mother' awaits, sealed in time, to reveal "the promise of perfection" (1973: 111); but the cathartic moment with the universal mother, bride, sister, and mistress is met by Wing's resolution to "use her no more" (46), and when he returns to New York, he becomes a studio musician, a downgrading occupation in the eyes many boppers, including Walden's.

These archetypal motifs and paradigms are consistent with the Beat romanticism, but they are susceptible to distancing jazz (and especially bop) from its immediate political and social raison d'être. Firstly, as Panish indicates, the Euro American emphasis on the soloist undermines the idiom as an aesthetic medium to express a uniquely communal experience. Holmes's exertion to unify the bop wave within the wider significance of the American experience resembles Mezzrow's last efforts to find a niche for his own role within the blues idiom by invoking its meaning as the music of the oppressed. Holmes straightforwardly stated in *Nothing More to Declare* that

> If the members of [the Beat Generation] attend to a wailing sax in much the same way as men once used to attend the words and gestures of sages, it is because jazz is primarily the music of inner freedom, of improvisation, of the creative individual rather than the interpretive group. It is the music of a submerged people, who *feel* free, and this is precisely how young people feel today. (1967: 124)

But by placing the American theme and the American artist as hero (the tragedy of Edgar, in the end, is the tragedy of the great artist who is constrained by social circumstance because of his revolutionary vision) at the forefront, the character's martyrdom is the sacrifice of the American (not the African American) for the freedom of America (not the African American community). Both Mezzrow and Holmes exalt jazz's qualities to express freedom, but fail to regard how such a liberty is consistent with the black community's experience. In *The* Horn, if there is any connection between the characters, it is because of their structural adherence to the hero's monomyth. In

Panish's words, "*The Horn* almost completely ignores the notion that these characters are interdependent because of the challenges they shared being marginalized African American artists / professionals in a Euro American society" (1997: 133). That white writers take the jazz hero as an emblem of American individualism, Panish suggests, is not an innocent misreading of the idiom, but an act of appropriation founded on assumptions made by the dominating group. The political significance of bop was to be found in the urban racial tensions of the postwar and in the Southern hostility institutionalized through segregation, not in the Beats' journey for spiritual fulfillment. The racial depoliticizing of Edgar, for instance, can be traced back to his youth. Metro recalls how Edgar's long-gone father returns to the homestead and exercises his control over his son by ordering him to get a "good colored man's job" (179). Angered, Edgar replies: "I'm gonna play horn . . . and that ain't white *or* colored" (180). While Edgar's refusal to comply to the authority of his father is heroic, perhaps Holmes would have shown a more acute understanding of the political aspect of bop had he made Edgar claim jazz as the true black idiom, and not having him embrace it for its color-blind appeal. Color-blindness may have represented freedom for hipsters and Beats, but Marxist-oriented perspectives advocate the need to distinguish and interiorize the fact that white and black circumstance are not the same, and that for the Beats to reduce bop to a music of dissenters of the establishment, black or white, indicates a failure to identify with the „other.' Panish constructs his case around the writing of Kerouac and Holmes, but the idea had already been expressed by LeRoi Jones in the 1960s:

> The white boppers from the forties were as removed from the society as Negroes, but as a matter of choice. The important idea here is that white musicians and other young whites who associated themselves with this Negro music identified the Negro with this separation, this nonconformity, though, of course, the Negro had no choice. (Baraka 1999: 188)

The notion of choice is important to understand why Beat authorship of the African American and jazz material is often interpreted as another means of colonizing otherness. It is not that Beats were unaware of the political differences between races; one of the first reviews of *The Horn*, written by Kenneth Rexroth for the *Saturday Review*, celebrated the novel and compared it to Kerouac's work as follows: "[T]he characters in *On the Road* don't have to live that way. The Negroes of *The Horn* do, and they don't like it a bit" (Qtd. Johnson 2007: 132). In the Barthean sense, the Beats

represent the avant-garde revolts to the bourgeoisie; they are "socially limited" and "come from a small section of the bourgeoisie itself" (1972: 139). The white Negroism phenomenon thus only appears as an aesthetic, not a truly political endeavor. By adhering to romanticism, the black experience is mystified and deprived of its historical specificities. As James Campbell notes in his commenting of the Beats' use of the automobile as a transcending symbol, "the white hipster takes leave of his Negro forebear" (2001: 81). It was because of the love for jazz that "the first Beat saw the face of its ancestor; and it was a black face," but, "while music and talk opened up a territory once exclusive to the multi-marginalized black," Campbell explains, "the automobile promised kicks to the white boy which, to the black, remained out of bounds" (2001: 81).

While such criticism is consistent to the general thematic and structural direction of *The Horn*, in all fairness to Holmes, there remain hints of the exclusively African American political side to jazz that not only pay tribute to actual artists, but imply that there are limits to the Euro American's assimilation of the idiom. Geordie is the most faithful incarnate of this spirit, as she always nurtures herself through the multi-layered discourse of the blues that she, like Billie Holiday, conveyed even while singing Tin Pan Alley tunes:

> Somehow [Geordie] never felt the irony of singing about stardust, Maytime, hands across the table, what a little moonlight could do – she, whose life had never been like that, and for whom love had mostly happened under a naked bulb in unadorned assent to human need, and from whom the city night had mostly kept the sentimental moon. For long ago she had discovered that all words are alike on their levels, and so she sang the papier-mâché, stagey, white men's words, lending them the brief sincerity of her dark voice to express the truth beneath their cheap shimmer. (97)

The subtleties of the art of signifying are not lost on Holmes, and his allusions of its parodying effects recall Mezzrow's observations that "the [jazz] lingo had to be *heard*, not seen, because its free-flowing rhythms and intonations and easy elisions, all following a kind of instinctive musical pattern just like Bessie Smith's mangling of the English language, can only hit the ear, not the eye" (1964: 189). Unfortunately, such revelatory moments are decorated by Holmes with slight touches that recall Van Vechten's exoticism. For all her humanity, the reader is often brought to the attention of the oozing sexuality of Geordie: "the sheer physicality of her weight . . . was too

astonishing to arouse mere desire, but built instead that full head of passion that always suggests rape as the only assuaging pleasure" (80). Where black feminists such as Hazel Carby and Angela Davis find blues women's sexuality to be empowering and a clear sign of agency, Holmes's allusion to rape evokes a standard form of objectification of black women during slavery. "The pale-eyed hipsters" watching Geordie become "paralyzed" in their obsession of "*having* to have her, to experience her, to know, to *know*" (80). Like Byron with Lasca, the hipsters fall under some primitive spell at the sight of the goddess of fecundity.

Really the Blues and *The Horn* present two genre approaches to the same problematic issue of the white Negro. Mezzrow's autobiographical account is revealing of a generation's sense of complex for its white (Jewish) heritage, a complex that Mezzrow struggles to overcome by claiming the blues idiom as universal to the oppressed peoples. Although Holmes does not depict the subject of passing, his narrative strategies raise the controversial concerns about authority, authenticity, and authorship. The hipster's failure, in the view of the postcolonial critic, lies in his draining of the other's aesthetic material whilst eluding the responsibilities that such a choice entails. Mezzrow's appraisal of negritude, though sincere, is short-sighted in its belief that „to live black' depends on will and membership through a ritualistic acquisition of codes. Mezzrow chooses liminality; it is not a given. Similarly, Holmes defends his authority and authorship by „authentically' constructing jazz ritualistic practices; but in his encoding them within the dominating Western archetypal patterns of the monomyth, he is inclined to relieve them from their racial-specific, political import. The Beat romanticist pretext overpowers the African American political circumstance, and the revolt, to recall Barthes's analysis, becomes one against the language of the bourgeoisie, not its status. "This does not necessarily mean that it approves of his status"; Barthes explains, "simply, it leaves it aside" (1972: 139). In this sense, the white Negroism theorized by Mailer, lived by Mezzrow, and fictionally encoded by Holmes emerges as an updated version of the Barthean rhetorical devices, where inoculation, privation of history, and identification appear as the prevalent strategies. For Mezzrow, the claim that the Negro epitomizes the socially oppressed (inoculation) is met by what the real tragedy of the book is – Mezzrow's individualistic struggle to assimilate. Holmes also admits to the abuse of the „other,' but, as we have

seen, these moments are underplayed by hints of primitivism and what is understood to be Edgar's subverting, heroic vision: color-blindness.

Is the white Negro (as a passing hipster and as an author who has appropriated black material), therefore, a true countercultural phenomenon or is he a perpetuator in using negritude as a commodity? Mezzrow's and Holmes's mystified equivalence between jazz and freedom, well-intended as it may be, erases African American circumstance. Either on the existentialist grounds of regarding the blues as the music of all oppressed peoples or under the romanticist, Whitmanesque imperative of cataloguing and identifying the American macrocosm within every liminal individual, the result is that the same mystifying patterns are reproduced. The 1940s and 1950s counterculture, in this way, appears as an extension of the same devices applied by early pro and anti-jazz critics, by Van Vechten and other Harlemaniacs. It is a connection that is highly ironic, for, needless to say, the principles of white hipsters such as Mezzrow clash deeply with aestheticism's games of the self. Van Vechten experienced the underground of the Harlem jazz cabaret from the safeguarding position of the cultivated, upper middle-class retreat, enabling him to jump from one form of sincerity to another, from one cultural context to the next. More than anything, he was delighted by his role as a discoverer of aesthetic novelties; aside from following an integrationist agenda, the opportunities to provoke and implode societal codes afforded him the freedom from boredom and conventionality that he dreaded, thus nurturing his thirst for excitement. White middle-class-turned-hipsters also escaped from conventionality and found in the jazz subculture the stimuli they needed to give meaning to the otherwise bland and hackneyed existence they were in for (that is, the „square' lifestyle). Contrary to Van Vechten, however, they resented the tourist-like stance of Harlemaniacs and rather than promote the integration of the black race within the economic structure of the white American supremacy, they sought to become full members and participants of the subculture, protecting its integrity by ideologically insulating it from the contamination of capitalism and its nucleus, the domestic household of the family. White hipsters envisioned themselves sharing the oppression of the Negro race, which was deemed preferable to the asphyxiating limits of middle-class values. Paradoxically, however, it is the method chosen to protect black aesthetic integrity which leads to the use of the

same rhetorical devices that the white supremacy had exploited through myth. From the position of an individual who has *chosen* those circumstances, one cannot help but fight for absolute inclusion, and the only way he can do it is by using mythic speech to mold and integrate his given circumstance within a culture whose history has lost its rigidity. In other words, black culture must be deprived of a rigorous meaning of its codes in order to grant space for Euro American members. Holmes's integration of jazz rituals within the Western archetypal monomyth is not only an attempt to assert authorship and authority, but also, in the end, it is an effort to produce the opposite effect: to include the white hipster within black culture. "There shall be no difference between them and the rest" (2004: 46), Whitman wrote of the black slave, and the white Negro made it his creed.

2.6. CONCLUSION

This section has aimed to trace the methods by which white supremacy exercises its authority and power over black aesthetics and black culture in a time period spanning more than four decades. As groups or generations born from the dominant culture steer from the hegemony's interests, we find that regardless of their more or less good-willed intentions, their emphatic sense of indebtedness to the grander issue of American aesthetics leads them to the depoliticizing and de-historicizing of the music. However, the discussion surrounding the authorial intent of the Beats, and in particular, Holmes, can also raise even deeper issues regarding racial bigotry when his work is contrasted to the novels of, for example Albert Murray, or Ralph Ellison's masterpiece narrative, *Invisible Man.* A close analysis of the mythographic structure shows that Ellison's and Murray's use of archetypes, monomyths, and temporal and spatial paradigms (stylistic brilliance and talent aside) is not unlike that of Holmes. The difference, as we will see, is one based on mythopoeia, not on mythography. Unlike Holmes, Ellison and Murray manipulated such devices to herald the blues idiom as an aesthetic that absorbs universal concerns within a strictly African American code, while Holmes strove to integrate jazz within universal mythopoeia by dissolving sociopolitical specificities. This distinction, nonetheless, is not without its multiple ambiguities. One of the main problems, for instance, arises when we dig deeper into Ellison's prime literary influences, among whom he counts Malraux, Hemingway, Dostyevsky, Mann, Joyce, Eliot, Twain and Melville. Ellison's departure from a strictly African American literary heritage (something he was particularly vocal about) brings him closer to the Whitmanesque endeavor of the Beats more than any other black writer at the time. Although Ellison was not exempted from accusations of „Uncle Tomism,' a demeaning allegation that haunted him for decades, *Invisible Man* was in its day (and still is) celebrated as the quintessential novel of African American existentialism and politics to be encoded in blues-idiomatic terms. Several questions sprout one after the other: Does adhering to a Eurocentric form of mythography imply a supremacist view? Not necessarily. Must an authentic portrayal of jazz answer solely to the codes of African American culture? Not necessarily, either. Does the race of the author redeem him from accusations regarding authority and authorship? Perhaps. Full answers will not be found

in the next section, nor in the rest of this dissertation; only further questions and issues on the still profoundly complicated matter of race in America can be gathered.

Before ending, a final note on Barthean mystification and jazz should be made. In a recent article, Ryan Jervin made the remarkable observation that current jazz fiction and poetry anthologies tendentiously refrain from republishing stories, novel excerpts and poems written prior to 1945. Regarding prose, if one is to take a quick look at these collections, he or she will indeed find that despite the popularity of jazz throughout the 1920s and 1930s, whatever fiction it may have inspired is generally excluded. The effort to obliterate the evidence, Jervin argues, rests in the fact that such works, because of their denigrating portrayals, are genuinely perceived as an offense to African American culture, an embarrassment to Euro Americans, and an insult to the contemporary symbol of jazz as America's high musical idiom. Post-World War II jazz literature, on the other hand, indicates, through bop, a pushing reverence of jazz; even if Marxist-inclined postcolonial critics find vestiges of supremacist conducts in Beat literature, the argument that their intention was to „democratize' jazz outweighs negative reviews. This narrowness in the choices made for publication presents an opposite direction to that taken by anthologists of jazz criticism, where pieces of disparate nature are sought and included, regardless of whether they illustrate a supportive or anti-jazz sentiment. The reason behind this difference probably lies in the interests of the editing company; as a jazz criticism anthology may find its target audience to be scholars studying the historic grounds of the music and its discourse, so might a jazz fiction anthology be targeted at readers unspecialized in the field of jazz. Be that as it may, Jervin's conclusions regarding fiction and poetry anthologies are of interest to our case because of his conjectures on jazz authenticity. He writes that:

> These anthologies make little room for earlier jazz writers who were not particularly interested in authenticating jazz – who often, indeed, exploited what they were able to trope as the music's commercial and ethnic inauthenticity, thereby addressing their own compromised, uncertain place within the economy and the nation. (Jervin 2004: 667)

It is difficult to evaluate to what extent there existed an interest in authenticating jazz on the part of white fiction writers, especially considering the lack of salvaged material. Van Vechten, I have argued, was aesthetically (and as an integrationist, morally) invested in authenticating jazz as a notable art, myopic as he may have been in his

employment of mystifying speech. But he made such an impact and became the ringleader of the Harlemania trend precisely because no other white writer had ventured in such a way into the jazz subculture as a subject matter. The symmetry in opinions between early jazz criticism and their fictional reflections has been lost to us in a great deal, and, as Jervin conveys, such loss is only in detriment of the richness found in a factual history of the music.

The anthologies' preoccupation with an adequate jazz portrayal is a corroboration of just how the problem of authenticity has evolved. Now that jazz is regarded as a high art, now that it has a respected canon, now that it has a place in the academia, and now that it holds a solid position within the marketing economy, the issues pertaining to authenticity are no longer based on „how' but on „whether':

> A more serious look at the first generation of jazz shows less an interest in voluntarist questions of „whether' than in social and historical questions of „how': how to satisfy the demands of both art and commerce; how to improvise within the organizations, disciplinary conventions, and arrangements of the culture industries. (Jervin 2004: 667)

Today jazz is still being de-historicized, but it is no longer white supremacy that holds the bourgeois interest; it is the guardians of the canon that move the strings. The canon has naturalized jazz in a new way, molding a grand, mythopoeic narrative that simplifies the contradictions and complications inherent to its historical development. That jazz fiction anthologies refrain from publishing material that questioned the authenticity and the high-art status of the music is not a sign that the binarisms that were once overtly displayed are no longer part of the issue. On the contrary: the concealment of the proof that those binarisms were once vibrant in jazz discourse attests to the fact that they still remain so. Despite the fact that in the final section we will examine this balance of power through mythistoric theory, the reader is asked to bear in mind that the mythographic and mythpoeic features of the canon are also intrinsically bound to Barthean mystification.

PART 3
SIGNIFYIN(G) THEORY AND THE AFRICAN AMERICAN JAZZ LITERARY TRADITION

Throughout this section, I examine the representative works of three African American writers from the perspective of Henry Louis Gates's Signifyin(g) Theory as a mythographic theory and mythopoeic device. I have chosen to analyze the written material of Alice Walker, Ralph Ellison and Albert Murray because it is my contention that in their work we can gather the embryo of contemporary jazz and blues criticism. While Walker's *The Color Purple* constitutes one of the essential aesthetic touchstones for feminist New Jazz Studies scholars, Ellison's *Invisible Man* and, although to a lesser extent, Murray's *Train Whistle Guitar* are the pillars of current mythopoeic trends where the music is praised for its democratic value and universal appeal. These writers were visionaries of a new world order, and they used the blues idiom as a symbol and a rhetorical instrument to articulate and expose the complex web of American race relations. A superficial look over the work of Alice Walker will instantly reveal that her primary concerns are centered on the issues of sexual, as much as racial oppression and abuse. Ellison and Murray, on the other hand (and whose

writings, as we will see, are similar in their aims and conclusions), have little, if any, regard for the topic of sexism or gender relations. Their focus is more in the line of the black / white binarism, and how it associates to universal mythical paradigms and the tradition of a universal (and by this I mean Western) literature. There is, in other words, a stylistic, narrative, and strategic breach separating Walker from Ellison and Murray. Be that as it may, they were all key writers in the deciphering and disintegration of white myths on jazz – from the primitivist and exoticist ideals and the notion of the music as a low form of entertainment, to the characterization of the blues as torch songs and expressions of lamentation. Walker, Ellison and Murray push the hierarchical antinomies to the forefront and mold their highly individualistic theories where these dichotomies are either inverted or fused within a single value. What remains is a counterstatement to previous denigrating stereotypes, a counterstatement that demands respect and admiration as much as it demands responsibility and action on the part of the black individual.

What Gates's Signifyin(g) Theory (construed here as a mythographic study with mythopoeic potential) provides is the method from which to understand the blues idiom as an element that intensifies the symbolic value of the vernacular and the method through which to conceive the organic structure of the African American literary tradition. Encoded within the blues idiom are life-affirming rituals and mythic references that allow the hero or heroine to deal with his or her immediate environment. It must be made clear that the three novels that we shall shortly consider, and much of the non-fiction work by Walker, Ellison and Murray, are studies prior to the appearance of Signifyin(g) Theory, and that therefore careful considerations are made when dealing with each of the authorial intentions. Nonetheless, indications of what would in time be regarded as Signifyin(g) Theory are clearly present, and it is in these interpretative crevices where the counterstatement to previous myths and racial (and in the case of Walker, sexual) stereotypes comes to life.

3.1. HENRY LOUIS GATES'S SIGNIFYIN(G) THEORY: AN OVERVIEW

The Signifying Monkey, first published in 1988, offered a revolutionary outtake from which to approach the African American literary tradition. Heir to Houston A. Baker's acclaimed study, *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature* (1984), it focuses on building an analytical theory from the foundations of the black vernacular language so as to explicate the intertextuality functioning between exclusively African American aesthetic codes. According to Gates, African American discourse deviates from the Western conception of signification, and constructs a tradition based on a culturally-shared usage of rhetorical games of double-voicedness. His approach is an empirical one; that is, he cultivates a theory through representative texts of African American authors as the starting point, most prominently from Zora Neale Hurston and Ralph Ellison to Alice Walker and Ishmael Reed. The penchant displayed between contemporary pieces is one that can be traced as far back as slave narratives, and even to West African oral mythology, and for this reason, Gates repeatedly insists that his theoretical framework is closer to one of a descriptive nature than to a prescriptive formulation. Overall, he claims, there is no need to develop a theory that may exalt African American aesthetics, for the tradition is already there. Rather, what he attempts is to describe the discursive intricacies that abound in these texts and to provide them with an adequate metaphor, one that may best represent the fusion of the rhetorical games involved in the vernacular discourse. The African trickster Esu-Elegbara and his American cousin, the Signifying Monkey, stand as the mythological and metaphorical referents from which the double discourse derives; their position as mediators and connectors and their ontology suggestive of the mergence of binarisms endow them with the potential to symbolize the organic, intertextual relationship governing the black tradition.

Although some resemblance between Gates's and Barthes's understanding of myth can be gathered, it must be clarified that in this section myth ought not to be regarded as a form of political (much less bourgeois) speech, nor as a tool to sustain a certain hierarchical socioeconomic structure. Empowerment is, to a certain extent, involved, for myth always implies potency. But whereas for Barthes this empowerment is grounded on sociopolitical manipulation, for Gates, Signifyin(g) Theory attests to the strength of the African American community by way of a self-reflective discourse. The

vigor with which black art is able to theorize about itself is empowering in the sense that it establishes and consolidates a community that is intimately conscious about its shared codes, thus bestowing a collective sense of identity that although often reactionary to supremacy, also grows independently, as a self-nurtured culture. Let us recall that for Barthes, the oppressed has no access to mythical speech, for his condition only supplies him with political language. Gates's theory points otherwise; African American culture has, in great part because of the institution of slavery, developed a metalanguage of rhetoric that recalls, in some ways, Barthes's second semiological order. In the introduction, and again emphasizing on the empirical approach undertaken, Gates explains that his aim is neither "to mystify black literature," nor "to obscure its several delightful modes of creating meaning," but "to begin to suggest how richly textured and layered" (1989: xx) black artistry is. In other words, Signifyin(g) Theory does not answer to the notion of myth as a form of speech for distortive manipulation and perpetuation of an up-down evaluation of traditions. There is no need to place a theory for the sake of praising a tradition, he argues, the tradition has been able to sustain itself for several centuries. Distortion and deformation through parody and pastiche remain, as we will see, key concepts within the pragmatism of the trickster figures, but they do not draw on the Barthean sense of the overall intentionality of myth.

Although Gates does not categorically refer to his study as a mythographic work (he merely calls it a theory of literary criticism or comparative literature), two main definitions of myth can be deduced from his doctrine. These definitions are intimately related, although we should be careful in applying them interchangeably. On the one hand, Gates refers to the myths of Esu-Elegbara and the orally-transmitted stories of the Signifying Monkey. In this case, myth is to be understood within the context of mythologies, as a body of narratives, of an oral and/or written nature, pertaining to the identity of any given culture (Coupe 2009). On the other hand, the rhetoric of signifying, illustrated in the mythology through the actions of the tricksters, is in itself a mechanism of mythopoeia. The techniques of parody and pastiche, which answer to the overall pattern of repetition with a signal difference, or repetition with reversal, or repetition through revisionism, create and recreate narratives of a cosmic transcendence for the community sustaining such discursive codes. In other words, as a form of mythopoeia, Signifying is responsible for the architectural design of the African American tradition. In this overview, I will focus exclusively on the first meaning, that

is, on the mythology of Esu-Elegba and the oral tales of the Signifying Monkey, so as to provide the reader with some insight into the narratives that attest to black culture's self-consciousness about the rhetoric of discourse and double-voicedness. In the next section, as we examine the links between jazz, the blues, and signifying, we will attend to the actual rhetorical devices and to their mythopoeic potential.

Contrary to the assumption that enslaved Africans and the first generations of African American slaves built a subculture from the void consciousness of a tabula rasa, Gates envisions the trauma of the Maafa and the Middle Passage as one where Africans retained their religious set of values, customs, and rituals, and passed them on to subsequent generations. The notion of Pan-Africanism is essential for the hypothesis of how the New World re-contextualized these mythologies, and how Esu is presumed to be the originator of the Signifying Monkey. The (semi)deity Esu has received many names: the Nigerian Yoruba called him Esu-Elegbara, and in the Fon culture of Benin he was referred to as Legba. His diasporic designations include Exú in Brazil, Echu-Elegua in Cuba, Papa Legba in Haiti, and Papa La Bas in the United States hoodoo.[30] National variations notwithstanding, Esu appears as the recurrent trope in the black mythologies of West Africa, Central and South America. His role is not unlike that of Hermes; as the descendant of divinities, he is the one who interprets the will of the gods to man and the one who carries the word of man to the gods: "As Hermes is to hermeneutics," Gates says, "Esu is to *Èsu- 'túfunààlò* („bringing out the interstices of the riddle')" (1984: 287). Symbolically, he stands at the crossroads of interpretation:

> Esu is the ultimate copula, connecting truth with understanding, the sacred with the profane, text with interpretation, the word (as a form of the verb *to be*) that links a subject with its predicate. He connects the grammar of divination with its rhetorical structures. (Gates 1989: 6)

But Esu should not be regarded as a passive medium; as a mediator, he rises with the full agency of a trickster. His astuteness is often founded on his uncontrollable sexual prowess (in iconography, he usually appears with a gigantic penis), and his art for hiding the literal under the figurative meaning attests to his ultimate power to articulate the indeterminacy of double-voicedness. The Fon's epithet of Esu as "the divine

[30] For the sake of simplification and to follow Gates's example, we will simply refer to the Yoruba trickster as Esu for the remainder of this study.

linguist" and "he who speaks all languages" is further illustrated in iconography by the calabash that Esu carries in his hands. The calabash contains the ase, which is "the word with irrevocability, reinforced with double assuredness and undaunted authenticity" (Gates 1989: 7). Ase was used by Olodumare, the supreme Yoruba entity, to create the universe, and so what Esu must protect is the cosmic power "which mobilizes each and every element in the system" (Gates 1989: 8), that which gives the world order and coherence, and that which makes a process of the universe. Esu teaches the god Ifa the system of interpretation, and it is through the trickster that the Yoruba seek to understand the message of the latter. Ifa knows and possesses the sacred texts, but the Yoruba must decipher these through Esu's principle of indeterminacy, his double-voicedness: the crossroads where Esu stands can lead to different interpretations at an intersection between truth and understanding:

> If Ifa, then, is our metaphor for the text itself, then Esu is our metaphor for the uncertainties of explication, for the open-endedness of every literary text. Whereas Ifa represents closure, Esu rules the process of disclosure, a process that is never-ending, that is dominated by multiplicity. Esu is discourse upon text; it is a process of interpretation that he rules. (Gates 1989: 21)

Although there is no material evidence to prove the kinship between Esu and the Signifying Monkey, it is Gates's belief that the latter may be an adaptation of the former within the context of African American culture. Their hermeneutical roles are indeed similar, for, like Esu, the Monkey places discourse upon text, and engages his listeners in a game of rhetorical devices of double-voicedness. The Monkey, which in the Esu mythologies was a secondary, yet crucial character (the monkeys, for instance, provide Esu with the sixteen nuts for the sixteen gods, thus connecting the worldly with the divine), appears in African American oral narratives as the protagonist. The Monkey arrived to the New World in the form of the *jigue*, a small black man prevalent in Afro-Cuban narratives. The *jigue* (Gates traces the etymology back to the Efik-Ejagham term for „monkey,' *jiwe*) comes from Orient, and was brought through the Middle Passage by the enslaved transmitters of his tales to emerge again as Esu in the Americas. In time, the metamorphosis shifting from one state of being to the other allowed each of the figures to acquire and unify the characteristics of one another: "The *jigue* is the monkey,

and the monkey is Esu, and both are doctors of interpretation. The three are trickster figures of the same order, the hermeneutical order" (Gates 1989: 20).

The tales of the Signifying Monkey differ from the Esu myths in that they are secularized versions of the narratives and in that they tend to reduce the paradigmatic structure to the symbolism of a triad of characters: the Monkey, the Lion, and the Elephant.[31] Although regional variations in terms of the plot have been noted, the body of stories tends to follow the same basic order: either for revenge or just to get his kicks, the Monkey induces the Lion, the self-proclaimed king of the jungle, to believe that the Elephant (who is the true king) has insulted him or his relatives. These insults often border on the language of sexual harrasment (of the Lion's „mama,' for instance), if not based on the mere parodying of the Lion himself:

> [The Monkey] said, "Mr. Lion," he said, "A bad-assed motherfucker down your way."
> He said, "Yeah! The way he talks about your folks is a certain shame.
> I even heard him curse when he mentioned your grandmother's name."
> The lion's tail shot back like a forty-four,
> When he went down the jungle in an uproar. (Qtd. Levine 1978: 378)

The Lion then confronts the Elephant, only to be badly beaten and all the more humiliated. He goes to find the Monkey, who is elated by his success, and further displays his verbal ability by signifying upon the Lion, mocking him and adding insult to injury:

> Now the Lion come back more dead than alive,
> That's when the Monkey started some more of his old signifying.
> He said, "King of the Jungles, ain't you a bitch,
> You look like someone with the seven-year itch." . . .
> He said, "Whup! Motherfucker, don't you roar,
> I'll jump down on the ground and beat your funky ass some more."
> Say, "While I'm swinging around in my tree,"
> say, "I ought to swing over your chickenshit head and pee." (Qtd. Gates 1989: 56)

[31] These stories were most notably first analyzed by Roger Abrahams in his studies of black culture in Philadelphia in the 1950s and 1960s, and have subsequently been the object of sociological analysis for scholars such as Claudia Mitchell-Kernan (1971) and Lawrence Levine (1978).

In some instances the Monkey accidentally falls from the tree, but once more tricks the Lion into letting him go or verbally distracts him to make his escape. Safe in the treetop again, the Monkey swings from branch to branch as he returns to his antics and continues to signify on the ‚dethroned' Lion.

The (anti)mediation performed by the Monkey derives, in Gates's view, from the (anti)mediation that Esu accomplishes between the gods and man and between man and the gods. The Monkey tales collect different forms of signifying, which we will attend to shortly, as we consider the rhetorical devices involved and their relationship to jazz and the blues. These forms of signifying answer to the same purpose: to subvert and invert the given world order; although the Monkey may appear under the guise of a villain (for such is the nature of all tricksters), and although his motives may be grounded on mere entertainment, his actions expose the vulnerability as much as the artificiality of social roles. Because of this, he emerges as a hero.[32] The Monkey lacks the Lion's physical presence or prowess, and yet he is able to defeat him through verbal wit. It is a story that only too well offers a sense of providence to the slave or the post-Reconstruction African American individual, where a skillful and commanding use of the rhetoric of indirection and indeterminacy can potentially offer a psychological release from oppression.

Before we consider the second meaning of myth and its applicability to jazz and the blues, a final note should be said on the nature of the Monkey tales as a genre. According to some mythographers, secular oral tales do not fall into the category of myths. This is not necessarily a Western distinction; the Dahomey Fon, one of

[32] It is interesting to note the paradox surrounding the fact that the hero to subvert the social order is none other than a monkey, for while he provides a heroic model in the tales, the monkey has also been notoriously used for the creation of racist stereotypes. This paradox was first analyzed by Abrahams in 1964, where he noted the inventive capacity of the black community to appropriate the images purported by Euro Americans and make them their own, to be used for their benefit in the development of a positive ethnic identity:

> Perhaps because of his African jungle heritage and the casual resemblance between some Negroid and some simian physical characteristics, the words 'monkey' and 'ape' have been used as derogatory words in relation to the Negro, and have achieved a meaning and notoriety very different from 'nigger.' In much the same way that 'nigger' has come to mean, among Negroes, any bad kind of Negro, so the word 'monkey' has come to mean any Negro that will unduly play around, and especially for the amusement of whites. As one Negro youth is reported to have said, "If you can act big enough monkey, you can get anything you want (from whites)." (2009: 137)

originating cultures of the Esu mythologies, categorically separate the *hvenho* from the *heho* in a manner not unlike the Western distinction between myth and tale. Meletinski lists the most salient changes resulting from the evolution from myth to tale:

> De-ritualization, secularization, the waning of faith in the veracity of mythical events, the development of a discourse of conscious invention, the loss of ethnographic specificity, the substitution of the mythical hero by the common man and of the mythical past by an indeterminate temporal dimension, the weakening or loss of the etiological aspect of the narrative, the switch from the focus on the community to the individual, and, finally, the triumph of a social sensibility over the cosmogonic aspect. (2000: 237)

This classification is not without its troubling complications, at least in the case of the Monkey tales. Although they are indeed secularized accounts and they follow a discourse self-conscious of its inventiveness (improvisation in the transmission of the tales is, indeed, a prime feature of African American folklore), their enactment is overwhelmingly ritualized through multiple practices. True, these practices are not of a liturgical nature but of an aesthetic one; yet the performance of signifying is intrinsically bound to the history and the shaping of the community (not the individual, as Meletinski suggests are the objectives of the tale) to such a profound extent that they cannot help but allude to the genesis of the present situation. The stories of the Signifying Monkey absorb the tensions and the hierarchies present in slaveocracy and subsequent forms of institutionalized racism, and as such they maintain a great part of the semantic and structural components of myth, for they retain significant aspects such as the way to deliverance (if not at a religious level, at least at a psychological one). True, they do not answer to a mythical but to an actual past; but this actual past is virtualized in a manner that recalls myth's resistance to expiry, where a narration of the past (creation myth) is, in the end, always about the future (myth of deliverance). The etiological order may appear weakened in the Monkey tales (they are not about creation per se) but they maintain the notion of creation as they provide a model of the first entity to defy the abusive ruler. In other words, the Monkey tales represent the change from chaos (the reigning terror of institutionalized racism) to order. In African American culture (or in any oppressed culture, for that matter) the triumph of social sensibility is homogeneously dissolved with the cosmogonic aspect: social freedom implies cosmic equilibrium. The characters are not common men, but neither are they mythical heroes, for they possess no further powers beyond those bestowed in speech.

Their animal qualities, which are instrumental in the development of the narrative (the physical strength of the Lion and the Elephant, and the Monkey's abilities to climb and swing from tree to tree) are intermingled with those of common man in a folkloric fashion.

Indeed, and as ethnographers such as Boas have noted, it is often extremely difficult to place folk tales as a genre. I do not mean to imply that the Monkey tales ought to be considered full mythologies, and, for the sake of simplification, I will continue to refer to them as „tales,' „stories,' or „oral narratives.' But the reader must bear in mind that the boundaries pertaining to genre often overlap, and that very frequently in these folk tales, mythological features are strongly retained.

3.2. SIGNIFYING, MYTHOPOEIA, JAZZ AND THE BLUES

In Signifyin(g) Theory, Esu and the Monkey are ontologically significant to the extent that they define themselves through the art of signifying. As masters of indirection and indeterminacy, they occupy not only the crossroads of interpretation, but moreover, they possess the power of naming as much as the power of unnaming. Before we consider the implications of such faculties in jazz and the blues, let us attend to the basic definitions of „signifying' and their semiotic foundation.

In African American culture, „signifying' carries a series of related meanings that point once more to the triumph of rhetoric and double discourse over the standard English form of signifier / signified. According to Gates, the only linkage holding the standard English form of „signifying' and black vernacular „Signifyin(g)' is one of homonymy.[33] While white Western culture has accepted Saussure's dichotomy of signifier and signified as the most accurate and viable description through which to account for common language use, Gates believes that "some black genius or a community of witty and sensitive speakers emptied the signifier „signification' of its received concepts and filled this empty signifier with their own concepts" (1989: 46). The belief in a strategic intentionality behind the development of black vernacular signification attests, according to Gates, to black culture's awareness of self-empowerment through the multi-layered discourse of a metalanguage. The homonymic pun is only further evidence pointing to the manner by which black vernacular manipulates the given, Western tradition:

> To revise the received sign . . . literally accounted for in the relation represented by *signified / signifier* at its most apparently denotative level is to critique the nature of (white) meaning itself, to challenge through a literal critique of the sign the meaning of the meaning. (Gates 1989: 47)

[33] Scholars who have approached Signifyin(g) Theory and even Gates himself have provided different spellings to refer to the black rhetoric of signifying. In this study I adhere to the following spellings: 'Signifyin(g) Theory' to refer to the critical literary framework, and 'signifying' to refer to black double-voicedness, unless indicated otherwise. In the case of quotations, I maintain the same spelling that was used by the author of the source.

The ‚colonization' of white language occurs at the level of the signified; the signifier ceases to be paired with a signified, and is accompanied instead by "a system of rhetorical strategies peculiar to their own vernacular tradition" (Gates 1989: 47). These rhetorical strategies are characterized and related through games of free play on the level of semantics and pragmatics. The utterance, therefore, is directed towards indirection, and this indirection offers a multiplicity of meanings. The Monkey misleads the Lion by tricking him into believing that the signifier (the body of words and sounds apparently purported by the Elephant) is paired with a faithful signified (the meaning of the utterances), whereas they only point to the Monkey's pragmatic intention to humiliate the Lion. The disruption of the signifier, therefore, is materialized at the level of the signified. At the same time, and because the concepts that are represented by the signifier are shared by the African American community, it is the skill and creativity with which the signifier is constructed that is valorized. To put it another way, since what is said, that is, the object of the rhetorical games, is well-known by the community (for it tends to fall into one of a limited number of possibilities), how it is said, that is, the linguistic artificiality wrapped around the intentionality, becomes highly prominent element from which to measure the level of success in performing the ritual.

Like the Barthean myth, the process of signifying is based on the colonization of a first language order through a second language order, and like Barthes, Gates understands the arbitrariness involved in the relation between signifier and signified. But whereas for Barthes, myth aimed towards a naturalization and the camouflaging of its intention as much as of its structure, signifying signifies upon its own linguistic artificiality. The signifying subject always hints that a rhetorical game is at play; if the pragmatic intention is, as Kimberly Benston states, to "trope a dope" (Qtd. Gates 1984: 286), then the signifying act is not completed until the ‚dope' realizes that he has been played. Without the Lion's final awareness that he has been tricked, the tales would not allude to the possibility of role-reversal that they attempt to convey. Barthean mystification, on the other hand, looks to erase its own footsteps: power in mystification is based on the bourgeoisie's inoculation and colonization of language so as to naturalize an oppressing hierarchical system. Empowerment through signifying is achieved through a public acknowledgement from the community that understands the double-voicedness. This community comes to understand and praise the manner by

which the subject overmasters the „other' through rhetorical proficiency, a skillfulness usually based on a repetition with reversal.

We should be careful, however, in assuming that the „dope' must always realize that he has been played. The Monkey tales stand as a parable; they represent the ideal completion of the process of signifying. However, when signifying occurred within a system of slavery of racial segregation, the object was, no doubt, to trick one's master or the abusive white man without him becoming aware of it. As Debra DeSalvo writes, signifying is "the use of language to affirm one's cultural identity in the face of oppression . . . [It] allows speakers to express bold opinions or feelings without fear of repercussion" (2006: 140). The troping of the „dope' only comes full circle (that is, to the point in which the Lion realizes he has been signified upon) when it has been ritualized by the members of the community who share those signifying games.

The difficulty in providing a monolithic definition of signifying lies in the multiplicity of its intentions. It is a rhetorical instrument that can be applied for a great number of things, precisely because it is a category inclusive of a number of tropes, among which are metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, irony, hyperbole, litotes, metalepsis, aporia, chiasmus, and catachresis (Gates 1989: 52). These tropes are used for different pragmatic means, which have become, for the most part, institutionalized within Afro-American culture through their transposition into ritual forms. As Gates discloses the multiple definitions of black signification given by scholars, we enter a world of perfomative sublimity, where the art of signifying procures a certain status for the subject. It is essential to remember that "one does not signify something," but rather, "one signifies in *some way*" (Gates 1989: 54). Gates is picking up on the open definition given by Roger Abrahams (2009), by which signifying arises as a technique of indirect argument or persuasion, a language of implication. These implications may come in the form of verbal insults (toasts, rapping, dozens),[34] story-telling in figurative language

[34] Jerry H. Bryant (2003) writes that the origin of the term 'toast' is unclear, but suggests, like Abrahams (2009), that perhaps it is rooted in the Scottish and American fraternity tradition of long, flamboyant speeches practiced among men as an expression of table manners. If such is the origin, then the African American appropriation of the term constitutes another form of overt signifying, where 'toasts' refer to the conglomeration of verbal techniques, most often of a violent or humiliating nature, with a phallocentric emphasis.

(lies),[35] loud-talking, or the more constructive forms of „killing the father' through a commemorative repetition with reversal. Thus, contrary to the much-established claim that signifying is solely a means of derision, Gates, like Claudia Mitchell-Kernan (1971), believes that insult may not necessarily always be the underlying intention. For Gates, the role-reversal involved may also serve as an act of tribute; in other words, signifying need not be based on a verbal destruction of the opponent through a symbolic destitution, but may function according to intertextual dynamics of developing a tradition.

Gates identifies four basic forms of double-voiced textual relations functioning within Afro-American literature: the tropological revision, by which "a specific trope is repeated, with differences, between two or more texts" (1989: xxv); the speakerly text, which uses the free indirect discourse to make shifts between levels of consciousness in the mind of a character who is half-protagonist and half-narrator; the talking text, the

---

'Rapping,' as Kermit Campbell (2005) notes, can have a variety of meanings in much the same way that signifying does, for it involves multiple forms of figurative language. As to the etymology, DeSalvo speculates that it might derive from the Krio (Creole) dialect of Sierra Leone of the 1700s, when the term 'rap' meant "to con, fool, or win a game of wordplay" (2006: 120).

The word 'dozens' is believed to be rooted in slave auctioning terminology. Traders would sell slaves individually if they were physically healthy and of a young age, while the sick and the old were sold in lots, generally of a dozen. According to Middleton Harris, "every slave knew that he was included among a *dozen* only if something was physically wrong with him. Thus, to be a part of a dozen was humiliating" (1974: 180).

[35] The relevance of 'lies' in the study of Afro-American folklore owes much to Zora Neale Hurston's *Mules and Men* (1935). The term 'lie' was used to refer to an oral story, usually of a fantastic nature, and normally involving a trickster figure of some sort (Brer Rabbit, the Devil, the slaves Jack or John, etc.). A great amount of these stories were secularized versions of creation myths; examples collected by Hurston include oral narratives explaining why blacks are black, why "the man takes and the woman makes" (1990: 34), how Jack beat the Devil for the first time, and so on. Hurston jotted as well additional verbs of speech that are commonly used in the black Southern communities and provide further evidence to Gates's theory that African American culture is extremely reflective and self-conscious of speech and speech acts. A couple of these terms include 'bookooing,' which Hurston defines as "loud talking, bullying, woofing" (1990: 13) and 'woofing,' which is "a sort of aimless talking. A man half seriously flirts with a girl, half seriously threatens to fight or brags of his prowess in love, battle or in financial matters. The term comes from the purposeless barking of dogs at night" (1990: 247).

trope through which black texts „talk' to one another; and rewriting the speakerly, which is based on the use of parody and pastiche. These categories are not monolithic, for hybrid forms through which to create intertextual relations may occur, but it is sometimes helpful to distinguish the type of semiotic and rhetorical process involved in order to proceed to a more rigorous textual analysis. In New Jazz Studies, it has been the case that the last category, rewriting the speakerly, has been considered the excelling technique through which to refer to the general trends in blues-idiomatic signifying devices. I have mentioned above that Gates does not understand signifying as merely a means of derision; his examinations of the implicit intentionality led him to distinguish between motivated signifying (parody) and unmotivated signifying (pastiche). By „unmotivated' Gates refers "not to the absence of a profound intention but the absence of negative critique" (1989: xxvi).

Although these forms of double-voicedness constitute the structural and rhetorical pillars from which to identify a self-conscious Afro-American literary tradition, Gates is careful to note that intertextuality, of course, is the relational element that molds any tradition, regardless of ethnicity. From the theories of Kenneth Burke and Harold Bloom to those of Mikhail Bakhtin and T.S. Eliot, the dynamism and organic development of a tradition is based on an intertextual openness and communication between present, past and future. A brief description of Eliot's view of tradition aids an understanding of signifying as a mythopoeic device. In "*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth" (first published in 1923), Eliot wrote that:

> In using the myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him. They will not be imitators, any more than the scientist who uses the discoveries of an Einstein in pursuing his own, independent, further investigations. It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history. (2005a: 167)

The intertextual parallels used by Joyce functioned as mythopoeic devices, as they produced, reproduced and recreated mythical models to explain the cosmos. The ordering implicit to myth is given through the sense of indebtedness, absorption and reaction to the inherited past, and it is essential to grasp contemporary literature not as imitative, but as intertextual. This spatial arrangement of literary works had already

been suggested by Eliot in his celebrated 1919 essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent":

> No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead. I mean this as a principle of aesthetic, not merely historical, criticism. The necessity that he shall conform, that he shall cohere, is not onesided; what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. (2005b: 153)

If we turn these assumptions to the African American tradition, we find significant similarities between Eliot's and Gates's theoretic frameworks. Signifying is represented, particularly through tropological revision, talking texts, and the trope of rewriting the speakerly, as a connecting vessel between past and present. The experimental form appearing in *Ulysses* and which Eliot celebrates mirrors black centricity on the signifier: it is the design, the architectural structure of the form / signifier which enables experimentation and allows the tradition not only to grow, but to flow spatially and organically. Experimentalism, although in principle invested in the breaking from conventions, cannot help but just be another mask through which to allude to the tradition. Eliot's mythical method even goes beyond aesthetics in that it digs into the psychological dimensions of myth and ritual: "Why, for all of us, out of what we have heard, seen, felt in a lifetime, do certain images recur, charged with emotion rather than others?" Eliot asks. "Such memories may have a symbolic value, but of what we cannot tell, for they come to represent the depths of the feelings into which we cannot peer" (Eliot: 1986: 141). These symbols are encoded within myth, an analogical model that allows the subject to peer into these precipices of human historical memory. The mythical method, which can be regarded as the signifier, is not just an aesthetic necessity, but seems to be bred out of human collective experience as well. In the same way, the intertextuality involved in signifying deems history and contemporaneity spatially and organically; experimentation is effected on the form, the signifier. In diasporic-like ripples, the black tradition is repeated in new black works, with the signal difference (the experimentation on the signifier) that exposes the talent of the author. Thus motivated and unmotivated signifying are black tropes through which to regard a model not unlike the mythical method; their very hermeneutical

nature provides them with mythopoeic powers to give order and perfect the chaos of black experience into a cosmos.

We find, therefore, that intertextuality is not unique to the black diaspora; however, the black vernacular's tendency to point to its own signifier does call for an understanding of an exclusively Afrocentric tradition. Furthermore, some of the issues that are at work in a theoretical development of a tradition acquire a distinct meaning when regarding the black vernacular. I mentioned above that works should not be regarded as imitative, but as intertextual. Indeed, every literary work is mimetic to some extent, but while for Eliot the danger in conceiving literature as mere imitation stemmed from possible connotations conjuring motionlessness, inactivity, and stagnancy, imitation has an additional stigmatizing meaning within black history. As Gates argues, part of the reason behind the concern for originality which is so frequently discussed in black letters may be found in the racist belief that Europeans and white Americans had about the „other.' "As early as the mid-eighteenth century," Gates writes, "David Hume (and later Immanuel Kant and Thomas Jefferson, among scores of other commentators) argued that black authors were not original in their writings. They were „imitative'" (1989: 113). The image of the black individual as a parroting creature was, undoubtedly, a construct that propelled racist stereotypes even more, for it presented a justification to the argument that blacks were intellectually inferior, lacking the wit and ingeniousness wheeling the process and progress of a race. In the 1930s, Zora Neale Hurston's declarations about originality and mimicry in Negro art brought a new anthropological perspective on the matter, one that doubtless influenced much of Gates's work. Hurston stated that:

> The Negro, the world over, is famous as a mimic. But this in no way damages his standing as an original. Mimicry is an art in itself. If it is not, then all art must fall by the same blow that strikes it down. . . . Moreover, the contention that the Negro imitates from a feeling of inferiority is incorrect. . . . The art of mimicry is better developed in the Negro than in other racial groups. He does it as the mocking-bird does it, for the love of it, and not because he wishes to be like the one imitated. (1998: 304-305)

Although Hurston's theory is simplistic in its explanation (the given motive being "for the love of it"), her suggestions about the art of mimicry anticipate Signifyin(g) Theory in their focus on the signifier. The revisionism, the repetition with the signal difference

of parody or pastiche, reveals the profound extent to which black culture is enmeshed in the deconstruction of any form of language, and the extent to which such languages are regarded as potential instruments for empowerment.

Signifyin(g) Theory, therefore, can be deemed as the most outstanding form of African American mythopoeia. Gates particularly takes a literary standpoint to double-voicedness, but notes that most, if not all other aesthetics deriving from the black vernacular, can be interpreted under Signifyin(g) Theory. In the remainder of this item, let us consider how jazz and the blues, as musical forms, function in accordance to black signification.

Gates's interest in the vernacular for the development of a literary theory was not unprecedented. In 1984, Houston A. Baker's *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature* had stressed the anthropological need to examine the black vernacular in order to approach the status of black aesthetics as a high art. Baker's openly quasi-Marxist perspective (he follows mainly the dialectics of Fredric Jameson) takes the metaphor of "the blues as matrix" as the starting point: "the matrix is a point of ceaseless input and output," Baker writes, "a web of intersecting, crisscrossing impulses always in productive transit" (1984: 3). By conceiving the blues as a matrix, Baker is conjuring an image with a dynamism not unlike that of Eliot's vision of the flux of tradition. The blues emerge as a culturally-specific communicative network; it is a space where signification and rituals are encoded, and it is a space that transcends the interests of the individual and appeals to the collectivity: "Rather than a rigidly personalized form, the blues offers a phylogenetic recapitulation – a nonlinear, freely associative, nonsequential mediation – of species experience" (Baker 1984: 5). As such, the blues is intrinsically bound to black signifying, for "the materiality of any blues manifestation, such as the guitar's walking bass or the French harp's „whoop' of motion seen, is, one might say, enciphered in ways that enable the material to escape into a named or coded, blues signification" (Baker 1984: 6). The blues' potential to signify invariably brings up the image of the crossroads; in the same way that Gates would, only a few years later, exalt the hermeneutical and double-voiced powers of Esu and the Signifying Monkey through an iconography of the crossroads of mediation, Baker already envisions the blues singer as the shaman-like figure at the intersection of the railroad tracks:

> The singer and his production are always at this intersection, this crossing, codifying force, providing resonance for experience's multiplicities. Singer and song never arrest transience . . . Instead they provide expressive equivalence for the juncture's ceaseless flux. Hence, they may be considered as translators.
>
> Like translators of written texts, blues and its sundry performers offer interpretations of the experiencing of experience. To experience the juncture's ever-changing scenes, like successive readings of ever-varying texts by conventional translators, is to produce vibrantly polyvalent interpretations encoded as blues. The singer's product, like the railway juncture itself (or a successful translator's original), constitutes a lively scene, a robust matrix, where endless antinomies are mediated and understanding and explanation find conditions of possibility. (1984: 7)

In the chapter dedicated to *The Color Purple*, we will attend to the mythical implications of the blues as a mediator between antinomies. For now, however, it is important to point out that the imagery of the crossroads, for the blues singer as much as for Gates's Esu and Monkey, is significant for its allusion to double-voicedness, and for its conveyance of African American culture as an organic force.

In the classical and country blues traditions, the crossroads also appears as a recurrent motif. According to African mythology, the crossroads represents the point where the living and the dead can contact each other (let us remember that its guardian, Esu, is the messenger connecting the worldly and the divine). Not surprisingly, under the growing influence of Christianity and pagan folklore, the crossroads also became in the blues a site where the devil roamed. Robert Johnson's celebrated "Cross Road Blues" (first released in 1937) has traditionally been interpreted as an indirect summoning of the devil to take the subject's soul:

> I went to the crossroad, fell down on my knees
> I went to the crossroad, fell down on my knees
> Asked the Lord above, "Have mercy now, save poor Bob if you please"
>
> Standing at the crossroad, I tried to flag a ride
> Standing at the crossroad, I tried to flag a ride
> Didn't nobody seem to know me, everybody pass me by
>
> The sun going down boy, the dark gon' to catch me here
> Oooo, eee boy, dark gon' catch me here
> I haven't got no loving sweet woman that love and feel my care
>
> You can run, you can run, tell my friend-boy Willie Brown
> You can run, you can run, tell my friend-boy Willie Brown

> Lord, that I'm standing at the crossroad, I believe I'm sinking down. (Johnson 1996)

Legends surrounding Robert Johnson (which he himself fomented throughout his career) remain today vivid narratives of the body of blues anecdotes and oral stories. These anecdotes tend to interpret Johnson's going to the crossroads as the moment in which the blues singer sold his soul to the devil in exchange for some benefit (a loving woman, to be a virtuoso guitar player, etc.). According to Elijah Wald (2004), tales about soul-selling blues players were not particular to Johnson, though he may perhaps be the most memorable of them all. What is intriguing is the fact that no actual mention of the devil is made in the song, the only supernatural entity being God. Some scholars have argued that perhaps Johnson's existential anguish at the crossroad stands for the terror at the possibility of being caught in the dark and lynched. Other scholars find in Johnson's crossroad a means to pay tribute to the life pattern of male blues players; Steve Cheseborough writes that it represents "the intersection of two main blues highways, the roads on which countless blues singers walked or rode as they sought work, migrated north, or just rambled" (2009: 83). Still, Debra DeSalvo, for instance, takes Johnson's longing for a ride as "slang term for a lover and a metaphor for divine possession – as in the *Vodou* ceremonies in which the *Ioa*, or spirit-gods, descend to „ride' members of the congregation" (2006: 53). Elijah Wald is also open to readings of the lyrics through superstitious beliefs arising from the melting pot of influences: "It is possible . . . that the old European legend of going to the crossroads to meet the Devil was overlaid with African memories of a „spirit of crossing paths' that Cuban Santeria belief calls Eleguá [Esu]" (2004: 271). The multiple interpretations arising from Johnson's lyrics attest to the symbolism inherent to the blues singer as a shaman, as an interpreter, and as a double-voiced, signifying subject. In the same way that Esu and the Monkey's interpretations tend towards indeterminacy, so do Johnson's lyrics require to be read figuratively, hence avoiding a monolithic signified, and providing the rhetoric of discourse upon text instead. The blues singer is as much a trickster for his earthly behavior (countless classical and country blues talk about „playing' their partners or rivals for the love of a significant other, for instance) as for his or her signifying command of language.

The Signifying Monkey has himself appeared as the main character in the lyrics of a multitude of songs. As Gates says,

> In black music, Jazz Gillum, Count Basie, Oscar Peterson, the Big Three Trio, Oscar Brown, Jr., Little Willie Dixon, Snatch and the Poontangs, Otis Redding, Wilson Picket, Smokey Joe Whitefield, and Johnny Otis – among others – have recorded songs about either the Signifying Monkey or, simply, Signifyin(g). (1989: 51)

Blues vocalist, bassist and songwriter Willie Dixon, for instance, recorded "Signifying Monkey" in 1947 as part of The Big Three Trio. The lyrics revived the story of the Monkey and the Lion, and used the Monkey's signifying upon the Lion as the chorus:

> You call yourself the Jungle King
> You call yourself the Jungle King
> You call yourself the Jungle King
> I found you ain't a doggone thing (Dixon 1998)

Dixon's song was covered by the Count Basie Orchestra in "You Call Yourself a Jungle King." Nat King Cole's "Straighten Up and Fly," written in the late 1930s, on the other hand, narrated the tale of the Monkey who rode on the Buzzard, and upon whom the Monkey signified as well:

> The Buzzard told the Monkey, "You're choking me."
> Release your hold and I'll set you free
> The Monkey looked the Buzzard right dead in the eye and said
> Your story's so touching, but it sounds just like a lie. (Cole 1994)

Cole's song would be recorded again by Oscar Peterson, Oscar Brown, Jr., Natalie Cole, Sammy Davis, Jr., Bobby Powell, and even by a white trio, the Andrews Sisters, among others; it became a celebrated jazz standard in popular demand.

So far we have considered the tradition of standards and the thematic themes and motifs that link the blues and jazz music to signifying. Now let us focus on blues-idiomatic forms of signifying through the musical signifiers. One of the first to point out the signifying processes involved in the blues was Ralph Ellison, whose ideology would be continued by Albert Murray. We will attend to these two writers in upcoming items; but it is important to point out that although blues-idiomatic signification was understood by the African American community from the late nineteenth century onwards, blues songs were generally conceived by Euro Americans as mere torch songs of lamentation, and Ellison and Murray became the pioneers in the construction of a

theoretical aesthetic frame to contest such opinions. The reason behind the Eurocentric depiction of the blues as torch songs laid in the fact that such critics focused exclusively on the lyrical content. Blues lyrics provide deep accounts of tragic situations; they absorb and articulate the hardships and tribulations of the black community, with a culturally-specific array of themes conjuring the immediate experience of the individual in his or her direct environment. Prevalent topics include sexual satisfaction, boasting, and frustration, love, poverty, hunger, incarceration, travelling, rivalry, jealousy, murder, natural disasters, alcohol, depression, infidelity, physical and psychological abuse, and hoodoo and voodoo practices. Although the tone of the lyrics may often times be comical, the pervading tragic aura is enmeshed in an overall sense of an existential anguish. But the blues is a music that embeds multiple discursive layers which contest and counteract the statements delivered in the lyrics. Ralph Ellison's notorious definition of the blues as a tragicomic discourse is one that critics continue to follow religiously today:

> The blues is an impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in one's aching consciousness, to finger its jagged grain, and to transcend it, not by the consolation of philosophy but by squeezing from it a near-tragic, near-comic lyricism. As a form, the blues is an autobiographical chronicle of personal catastrophe expressed lyrically. (Ellison 1995b: 78-79)

Survival, that is, the will and strength to continue reaffirming the value and meaning of one's life, involves a state of self-awareness that does not consist in overcoming past experience, but in transcending it. Transcendence is a recurring concept in the work of Ellison. Overcoming experience would imply letting the past go and learning a new form of conduct and social behavior that would permit the black individual to carry on through life. Transcendence goes deeper than that. It is not about letting go of the past, but rather about maintaining it in the "aching consciousness" so as to understand the meaning of personal and social experience, and from which a pure form of artistic expression will be born. This aesthetic articulation of expression can only be accomplished through the acceptance of the tragicomic essences of life. Tragicomedy brings into play a more adequate hero for the complexities of the modern world, where

a traditional epic hero would be insufficient.[36] It is not that epic action is underscored, but redefined under new terms: the new epic hero, for Ellison, is the tragicomic hero, which is best incarnated by jazz musicians. Being a tragicomic hero involves the ability to reduce the chaos of living into form, a conceptual procedure that Ellison inherited from André Malraux's *The Voices of Silence*.

The idea of transcendence is doubly ritualized in the blues through two main schemes. On the one hand, the call-response pattern, inherited from African American liturgy, creates a discursive space where the singular experience of the singer is intertwined with that of its audience. The black audience identifies and acknowledges the lyrical themes as those topics around which their own lives revolve, and so in the characteristically AAB pattern (through which the first line of the verse is repeated and the third provides the lyrical variation) the personal experience and the socio-political collective experience become a homogeneous flow. To return to Baker's „blues as matrix' metaphor, it is in this aesthetic space where the private and the public fuse into a single alloy within the aesthetic womb. The result of such a ritual is that "what emerges is not a filled subject, but an anonymous (nameless) voice issuing from the black (w)hole" (Baker 1984: 5). As such, "the blues singer's signatory coda is always *atopic*, placeless: „If anybody ask you who sang this song / Tell 'em X done been here and gone'" (Baker 1984: 5).

The second ritualized form aiming for transcendence is the contestation between the tragic lyrical statements and the performative vocal or corporeal acts staged by the musician. These visual or soundscaped displays fall at the disposal of the performer's rendition of the song at hand; they are signifying techniques through which the lyrics may be dramatized, satirized, or parodied. Albert Murray professes that:

> Regardless of how scrupulously accurate the singer's rendition of even the most powerful lyrics, that verbal statement can be contradicted and in effect

[36] Transcendence and its connections to laughter was an idea that Ellison picked up from one of his literary mentors, Kenneth Burke. Ellison says that according to Kenneth Burke, "comedy should enable us to be observers of ourselves while acting. Its ultimate end would not be passiveness but human consciousness. [It should allow] one to transcend himself by noting his own foibles . . . [and should] provide a rationale for locating the irrational and the non-rational" (1995b: 651). Ellison is quoting Burke on *Attitudes toward History* (1937). It should be clarified that the brackets are Ellison's.

> cancelled by any musical counterstatement. If the lyric laments but the music mocks, the statement is not one of lamentation but of mockery. If the words are negative yet the music either up-tempo or even medium or slow but earthy, the tidings are not sad but glad withal. Even when the tempo is drag-time, it is far more likely to be sensual than funereal. The words may bemoan the loss of a lover, but if the singer is also involved with such choreographic gestures as finger popping, shoulder rocking, and hip swinging all the while, the statement can hardly be considered a form of bereavement. If blues lyrics in themselves accounted for as much as most standard dictionary definitions so obviously take for granted, the effect they create would be quite different from what it is in fact well known to be. (2000: 82-83)

Murray's description of the blues idiom as an act of contestation between lyrics and performance (that is, the dynamic feud between the tragic and the comic) has been useful for the development of signifying critiques within other fields of cultural studies. As we will see, such operative forces have enabled the construction of a feminist approach to the classical blues of the 1920s, for example. According to such a theory there exists, therefore, a sort of covenant of agreed-upon race-specific codes that, firstly, allow the performance to be conceived as a ritual, and secondly, demand from such a ritual that it be developed around signifying techniques. To a certain extent, these implications become problematic if we consider the emphasis that the jazz sphere places on individuality. T.S. Eliot prioritized "the mind of Europe" over the poet's "own private mind" (2005b: 153), the mythical method being the path towards an impersonal tradition that necessarily overlooked the personal interests of the poet. The use of ritualized formulas and conventions accommodates such an understanding: Baker's depiction of the blues as ‚atopic' and the homogeneous mergence of the personal and the political can be regarded, in this way, as an effort towards establishing the idea of an impersonal tradition of the music. In terms of the early blues, there is little evidence to suggest otherwise: lines and riffs were systematically borrowed by musicians from each other and from popular songs without paying heed to authorship. W.C. Handy, for example, took credit in the writing of "Yellow Dog Blues" and "Memphis Blues" but admittedly claimed to have made a transcription from lines he had heard on the street.

But the blues and jazz, especially since the rise of bebop, have as well been regarded as highly individualistic aesthetic forms. Jazz history has itself been developed around the experimentation and musicological revolution of a number of selected men; the Great Man Theory, which we will attend to in our consideration of the mythistorical

construction of the jazz discourse in the final part of this dissertation, has been instrumental for the forging of a canon. While it is arguable that commercial interests have played a significant role in the launching of individual artists, ensembles, or orchestras, we cannot ignore the fact that the African American community itself, as an audience, actively contributed to the proclamation of individual names. The shaman-like blues singers could be imitated, but there always remained the idiosyncrasy that endowed them with a distinct position among the hundreds of other blues musicians. Sterling A. Brown's 1932 poem, "Ma Rainey," which focused on the revaluation of the idiom under folk-literary terms, epitomizes the harmonic coexistence of the apparently contradictory forces (individuality / impersonal tradition) presented in the blues. Developed in four stanzas, the poem represents Rainey as the epicenter of the working-class African American community. Her aesthetic magnetism draws in all members of the community, who gravitate towards her from different geographical locations:

> When Ma Rainey
> Comes to town,
> Folks from any place
> Miles aroun'
> From Cape Girardeau
> Poplar Bluff,
> Flocks in to hear
> Ma do her stuff;
> Comes flivverin' in,
> Or ridin' mules
> Or packed in trains,
> Picknickin' fools. . . .
> That's what it's like,
> Fo' miles on down,
> To New Orleans delta
> An' Mobile town,
> When Ma hits
> Anywheres aroun'. (Brown 1995: 232)

The second stanza further develops this survey of Southern blacks, who come from "river settlements," "cornrows" and "lumber camps" to see Rainey's "gold-toofed" (Brown 1995: 233) smile. In the third stanza, the collective voice of the poor abandons the celebrative tone of the previous parts and appeals to Rainey to sing about their hardships in a rhetoric that recalls the predicaments in which spirituals were born:

O Ma Rainey,
Sing yo' song;
Now you's back
Whah you belong,
Git way inside us,
Keep us strong. . . .
O Ma Rainey,
Li'l an' low;
Sing us „bout de hard luck
Roun' our do';
Sing us „bout de lonesome road
We mus' go. . . . (Brown 1995: 233)

Even though Rainey is glorified to the extent that she epitomizes the role of a savior, Brown points out the little emotional distance standing between singer and audience. Rainey belongs to the working class; she is "the high priestess who has the power to articulate the pain and suffering of her people" (Gabbin 1994: 158), she is part of each and every member in the same way that each member is part of her. Her power is based on the reciprocity of identities, one that exploits a deictic game between the „we,' the „you' (Rainey), the „I' of the poet and the „she' (also Rainey). What Brown attempts to reflect is a multivocal construction of experiences, one in which he doubly participates. Nicole Furlonge argues that "Brown complicates the notion of audience further by including himself as poet within it . . . [The poet] functions not only as a mediator but also as a part of the listening public" (1998: 978-979). Thus, although the poem does not follow a conventional blues structure (repeated AAB stanzas), the call-response pattern characteristic of the blues idiom is maintained at alternative levels. First of all, the members of the community respond to Rainey through their motion: Brown presents a cartographical space in which individuals travel from different areas and locations of the South and concentrate upon a single spot that defines them as an audience. Secondly, the community, now conceived as an organic entirety, calls upon Rainey to sing to them. Brown's depiction of Rainey's response, developed in the last stanza, is highly significant:

I talked to a fellow, an' the fellow say,
"She jes' catch hold of us, somekindaway.
She sang Backwater Blues one day:

'It rained fo' days an' de skies was dark as night,
Trouble taken place in de lowlands at night.

'Thundered an' lightened an' the storm begin to roll
Thousan's of people ain't got no place to go.

'Den I went an' stood upon some high ol' lonesome hill,
An' looked down on the place where I used to live.'

An' den de folks, dey natchally bowed dey heads an' cried,
Bowed dey heavy heads, shet dey moufs up tight an' cried,
An' Ma lef' de stage, an' followed some de folks outside."

Dere wasn't much more de fellow say:
She jes' gits hold of us dataway. (Brown 1995: 233-234)

In accordance with the linguistic matrix that Brown has created through the use of vernacular forms, Ma Rainey's response is achieved through the evocation of a listener. Rather than supplying the singer with her own voice, the poet quotes a third person who quotes Rainey. These meta-discursive layers enclose the barriers of the working-class community, defined by its use of the vernacular form. The different voices, perceived either individually or collectively, resonate within the barriers, calling and responding to one another, held together by Rainey's power to attract and to identify with her people, catching hold of them "somekindaway."

Brown's poem is illustrative of the coherence inherent to the double sustenance of an impersonal tradition and individuality (in the figure of Rainey as much as that of the poet). The multiple voices interconnecting the experience, spatially providing it with coherence and cohesiveness, and the sense of collective identity deriving from the shared acceptance of formulas and conventions exalt the value of the tradition itself, while the acknowledgement of Rainey as the „Mother of the Blues,' the highly personalized vessel through which the experience of the community is wrought, named, and challenged, emphasizes the individuality of the artist. In his study of Miles Davis's signifying techniques, Robert Walser has noted that Gates's Signifyin(g) Theory is inconsistent with individuality: "If individuality and originality are fetishized, signifyin' is lost, for it is fundamentally dialogic and depends on the interaction among musicians, their audiences, and the experience and texts they exchange" (1995: 180). I argue, however, that in the case of the blues and jazz idiom, as can be illustrated through the poem by Brown, the individual and the dialogic need not be antithetical, for not only are

features of both retained but moreover they are both pillars for the solidification of a blues-idiomatic tradition and canon. That the personal and the socio-political dimensions become entangled with one another does not imply the obliteration of the personal, but rather its ramification: the blues singer retains his or her individuality through his or her characteristic signifying performance of the song, while the audience identifies itself with the experience narrated in the lyrics.[37]

In the same way that a position of reverence has been granted to certain blues musicians, so does the highly individualized jazz soloist receive a privileged spot in the canon. These soloists are those whose experimentation marks the signal difference to the repetition, either through motivated or unmotivated signifying. The exploitation of conventions and formulas indicates a pastiche of the forms of the past, but the individuality will be expressed through the innovations brought on by the soloist's unique vision. Earlier, I referred to the covering of Willie Dixon's "Signifying Monkey"

[37] The debate about the competing forces between individuality and the dialogical has been long sustained in the field of musicology on the complex grounds of harmonics. Leonard Meyer argues that "real jazz" is "a kind of folk music" because for all its improvisation, there is always a "basic ground plan" that is "essentially harmonic, though the specific tune used as the basis for variation may also be an important departure point for embellishment and deviation" (1961: 253). As such, "the aesthetic effect of the music depends both on the listener's awareness of the basic ground plan . . . and upon his ability to compare the successive variations as they follow one another" (Meyer 1961: 254). In this way, expression succumbs to ritualization, which in turn obliges to dialogic necessity. The counterargument to this theory, however, is that the soloist's individual expression as reflected in the act of improvisation consists in itself in the asseveration of what Theodor Adorno refers to as the truth (the historically-grounded tradition) of the structure. According to Adorno, "no chord is false 'in itself,' simply because there is no such thing as a chord in itself and because each chord is a vehicle of the total context" (2004: 36). Individual geniusness as it appears in jazz (through variation and ornamentation) becomes integrated within the harmonic expression: what the jazzman brings onto the scene is an original form of readdressing the truth, thus allowing the idiom to progress and evolve into new eras. The allusion to the truth (itself a form of signifying) whilst in spontaneous redefinition of what the truth implies not only obviates the compatibility between the original and the dialogical, but furthermore suggests that the two are irreparably conjoined. This understanding of progress is characteristic of Thomas Carlyle. We will duly attend to his Great Man Theory in Part 4, but it is important for now to point out that he conceives the heroic function to be the innovation that will debase and debilitate the former expression of the truth, now in a state of corruption and decay, and replace it with a new, untainted vision of the truth.

and Nat King Cole's "Straighten Up and Fly"; indeed, the repetition of previous material has always been a formidable path for musicians to acquire their own sound. Once the given apprentice has mastered the technique and the tone in the recordings of he who he considers his mentor, he can experiment over the form, the signifier, in an odyssey to find himself. The countless number of published standard sheets, *The Real Book*, and the so-called fake books constitute the aiding literature of lead sheets for the continuation of this disciplined learning technique. Jazz has no use for copycats; it only grants space to those whose sound hints some progression, some innovation within the idiom. A certain school or movement emerges when a set number of genius innovators signify upon the past in some form. This „killing of the father,' as we have seen in the analysis of Mezzrow's and Holmes's works, is often ritually produced through cutting contests of a competitive nature. Let us remember that in *The Horn*, Walden overpowers Edgar through a cutting contest in the first chapter, and in the final scenes, Edgar collapses while witnessing Walden practically effortlessly performing the same solos that had rendered Edgar as the genius innovator years back. Walden's performance is a tribute to his mentor, but the fact that he can spontaneously imitate him also indicates Walden's slaying of his mentor. These cutting contests represent musical versions of the verbal duels illustrated in the Monkey tales. The black adolescent's passage from immaturity to adulthood through the assertion of his masculinity encoded in his improvisatory skills for toasting, rhyming, or rapping against his opponent is taken to the jazz sphere.

That jazz has built its tradition on repetition with a signal difference is certainly not lost on Gates, who states that "there are so many examples of Signifyin(g) in jazz that one could write a formal history of this development on this basis alone" (1989: 63). Since the emergence of Signifyin(g) Theory, this history has been slowly building itself in ethnomusicology and in New Jazz Studies. Most notably, Ingrid Monson's essay "Doubleness and Jazz Improvisation: Irony, Parody, and Ethnomusicology" (1994) initiated the deconstructing studies of solo performances in the search of musical forms of creating parody and pastiche. Monson scrutinized John Coltrane's recording of "My Favorite Things," and through the evidence of noted transcriptions, argued that Coltrane was parodying the Eurocentric bias of the Broadway hit: "Coltrane's version of „My Favorite Things' turns a musical theatre tune upside down by playing with it,

and turning it into a vehicle for expressing an African American-based sensibility in such a way that even many non-Africans prefer it to the original" (1994: 298).

There is a downside to the actual accuracy of Signifyin(g) Theory in the jazz context, however. It is Monson's belief that the intentionality behind Coltrane's cover was to subvert given hierarchies through the perfection, the technical improvement of the song – both from African American and Eurocentric musical standards, for Coltrane was a master of both forms. Yet the connections between the transcripts and Monson's claim of the signifying intentionality are dubious, proving that Signifyin(g) Theory can sometimes fall short of an empiric demonstration. Monson can only speculate on the matter by putting the musicological and cultural pieces together:

> This transformation of "My Favorite Things," or what Gates would term „Signification' upon the tune, inverts the song at nearly every level. It makes the vamps (over which the improvisation takes place) rather than the verse the subject of the performance; it transforms the waltz time into a polyrhythmically textured 6 feel, and it transforms a sentimental, optimistic lyric into a vehicle for a more brooding improvisational exploration. Since the lyrics would have been on the sheet music the song plunger brought to the quartet, Coltrane would have been well aware of the emphasis on „white' things in the lyric – girls in white dresses, snowflakes on eyelashes, silver white winters, cream-colored ponies. In 1960 – a year of tremendous escalation in the civil rights movement and a time of growing politicization in the jazz community – Coltrane quite possibly looked upon the lyrics with an ironic eye. (1994: 297-298)

It is speculations as to the artist's personal underlying interests which has, to some extent, discredited Signifyin(g) Theory as an objective tool to shape the canon. The overwhelming amount of modal verbs and expressions of possibility and probability that abound in scholarly studies of jazz and signifying has mystified (in the sense of having created a distorted illusion) the history of the shaping of the music. According to Townsend, "the scenario that is proposed by [Signifyin(g) Theory] is of whole generations of black musicians continually playing songs which they secretly despise, and expressing this view only by covert signals in their performances" (2000: 170). Indeed, it is hard to confirm the extent to which each individual musician actually attempted to parody and show his contempt against whiteness. Objectiveness and accuracy of detail may be lost, but the canon, because of its intrinsic association to myth, becomes even more empowered. As the basic structural components of myth are, as I have indicated several times throughout this study, essential binarisms, the

propagation of motivated signifying as the instrument building upon the tradition nourishes the basic black / white antinomy. In other words, parody (and to a milder extent, pastiche) fosters the separateness and irreconcilability of opposing antinomies, furnishing the immaculateness and purity of whiteness and blackness as insulated categories aiming to subdue one another.

Signifying, therefore, is bound to myth in more than one way when considering the blues and the jazz idioms. Firstly, frequent lyrical references to the Monkey tales and to recurrent motifs such as the crossroads or the trickster indicate a heritage of the Esu mythologies and the subsequent stories that constitute Afro-American folklore. Secondly, signifying can be regarded as a characteristically black mythopoeic device that gives order, cohesion and coherence (that is, it carves a cosmos out of the mass of chaos) to the aesthetic tradition and that is reflected through ritualized forms that merge the personal and the political without annihilating individuality. The trope of the talking texts and the use of pastiche construct an organic flux between past, present, and future. Thirdly, the contestation between content and lyrics through irony, parody, or dramatization reduce the blues idiom to an epic struggle between tragic and comic forces, a struggle which both mirrors and exemplifies the individual's and the community's strategy for survival and overcoming of hardships. Lastly, an excessive use of Signifyin(g) Theory aids the development of a mystified canon whereupon the black / white binarism regains its position as the embryonic essence directing and articulating jazz history, and therefore, exploits its potential as a mythopoeic technique. In the following items of this section I analyze the manner by which these forms of mythopoeic signifying are transferred to blues or jazz-idiomatic motifs in the literary rhetoric.

3.3. BLUES WOMEN, MYTHOPOEIC FEMINISM, AND ALICE WALKER'S *THE COLOR PURPLE*

To approach *The Color Purple* (1982) from a signifying perspective is to enter into a dialectic discussion with the dozens of scholars who have dedicated invaluable research to the analytical deconstruction of the intertextual layers embedded within Walker's text. Indeed, the narrative is rich with deictic references pointing to the African American literary tradition as much as to the Eurocentric one, and it is scarcely a wonder that the novel stands as a canonical text for educational purposes in the fields of African American, American, feminist, and literary theory studies. To cite just a few examples of the signifying possibilities *The Color Purple* offers, here is a short list of scholarly pieces: Gates dedicates the closing chapter of *The Signifying Monkey* to Walker's rewriting of Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) and, to a lesser extent, Rebecca Cox Jackson's *Gifts of Power* (written between 1830 and 1832 but not published until 1981); Maria Lauret adds that *The Color Purple* also signifies on "the early history of the novel, the novel of letters written by [Samuel] Richardson [and also] on Fanny Burney and other white women" (2000: 98); Martha J. Cutter (2008) analyzes Walker's revision and rewriting of the rape archetypes of the myth of Philomena (as collected in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*); and Priscilla L. Walton (2008) argues that *The Color Purple* also signifies on Jane Austen's novels. These are just some of the multiple essays that have delved into the novel's signifying devices. Similarly, the novel's blues woman character, Shug Avery, and Walker's feminist depiction of the blues discourse have received widespread critical attention: Lauret (2000), Delores S. Williams (1985), Thomas F. Marvin (1994), Maria V. Johnson (1996), and more recently, Robert H. Cataliotti (2007) are just some names among the many scholars who have published acknowledged works about the topic.

The flooding amount of literature on *The Color Purple* posits two main problems for the development of an analysis of blues-idiomatic mythopoeia: firstly, the significant reduction of available bibliography to the most pertinent studies, and secondly, the carving of a space for interpretation that not only may unite discussions about signifying and blues symbolism, but may also bring up fresh issues from which to reread the text. The former has proved to be a more arduous task, but the latter is not without its straining difficulties. Still, there remain some important crevices that are in

need of illumination and that, I believe, raise compelling questions about the mythic potential of the blues as translated into narrative fiction. I find myself under the obligation of beginning this chapter with these apologetic remarks for two reasons: to justify the undertaking of a novel that has since its publication so frequently been discussed through Signifyin(g) Theory and by way of its blues themes, and to procure the reader with some assumptions that, due to the empiric nature of these previous studies, require no need for further explanation or justification. The first assumption is that *The Color Purple* signifies upon Zora Neale Hurston's work through a unique use of the black vernacular, where Hurston's free indirect discourse is reproduced in Celie's unquoted writing of direct speech. The second assumption is that the novel also signifies, either through its use of the epistolary genre or through its archetypal motifs, upon Eurocentric classic texts (especially those of the nineteenth century) and myths. Thirdly, that the character of Shug Avery represents the womanist incarnate, in accordance with Walker's womanism as expressed in the opening of *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens* (1983). Walker defines a womanist as "a black feminist or feminist of color. . . Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, corageous or *willful* behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered ‚good' for one" (Walker 1983: xi). She goes on to list the requirements; a womanist is:

> A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility . . . and woman's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally universalist. (Walker 1983: xi)

Womanism stands as the first philosophical branch to have been inspired on and designed for African American women. Many black feminist have found it to be a racially and culturally-specific theology that propels black women's voices and creativity as artists. It is important to stress the significance that past legacies have on Walker's womanist contemporaries. According to Barbara Christian, "the black women of [Walker's] generation must garner wholeness from the bits and pieces of the past and recreate them in their own image" (1985: 182). The individuality of the womanist is not overshadowed or annulled by these fragments of past legacies; rather, womanism stresses independence as much as it does unity, in a trans-epochal manner not unlike the

blues and jazz tradition that enhance Great Men while in celebration of a single idiom. As a womanist, Shug Avery emerges as a vessel, "a catalyst and moral-agent model" (Williams 1985: 88) who is the guiding hand in Celie's initiation into the constructiveness and self-assertiveness of a half-religious and half-pagan philosophy. To put it clearly, "Shug is the mouthpiece" of "Walker's womanist philosophy" (Lauret 2000: 111).[38]

The fourth assumption is that Shug Avery answers to the blues woman archetype presented in other texts by black women, such as Gayl Jones's *Corregidora* (1975) and Toni Cade Bambara's "Witchbird" (1977), as pointed out by Hazel Carby (1998) and later again by Cataliotti (2007). In these texts,

> The blues woman provides a natural outlet for the fictional exploration of black feminist issues because of her independence, both financial and sexual; her sidestepping of preconceived societal roles; her achievement of empowerment through self-construction of an identity; and her ability to give voice to her own – and other women's – inner struggles and triumphs through artistic expression. (Cataliotti 2007: 78-79)

The last assumption to keep in mind is that Walker draws a great part of her inspiration from black music for any of her writings, a fact which she has reiterated quite often. Her collection of stories *You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down*, published the same year as *The Color Purple*, takes its title from Mamie Smith's song "You Can't

[38] Walker's biographer, Evelyn White, has suggested that the term 'womanism' was more effective in itself for the development of a purely black feminist collective consciousness than the actual philosophy it entailed. Considering the aftermath of Radical and Cultural Feminism in the late 1970s and early 1980s, it is no wonder that the black feminist movement found vigor and strength in the popularity of a word that clearly distinguished their interests from those of white feminists, who had led and articulated the movement during the preceding decades. "The term resonated profoundly with black and other minority women for whom identification with the 'white' feminist movement had become highly charged, if not anathema" (2004: 377), writes White. She goes on to add that

> With 'womanist' in the lexicon, many black women felt more comfortable speaking about their experiences as survivors of rape, child abuse, or domestic violence. Gone was their fear of being labeled 'man-hater' or lesbian, the routine 'slurs' directed at women identified as feminists, regardless of their sexuality. By the same turn, many black lesbians took refuge in a word they could readily link to their mothers, grandmothers, and aunts. In short, 'womanist' was devoid of the damning social stigmas affiliated with women's liberation. (E. White 2004: 378)

Keep a Good Man Down" and is dedicated to the early classical blues women for "insisting on the value and beauty of the authentic" (Walker 1990). Within this collection, the story "Nineteen Fifty-Five" emerges as the most visible tribute to these muses.

The present chapter takes these presumptions as the starting point for the analysis. In terms of the novel, the focus will be exclusively around Shug Avery. Before considering the novel, however, I begin by analyzing some non-feminist and feminist critiques of blues women of the 1920s so as to later fit the character of Shug within a mythopoeic trend that became the standard for the construction of feminist icons in the years after Radical Feminism, Cultural Feminism, and Black Nationalism. Within this scope, I aim to weave the significance of Shug as a signifying heroine. In this way, myth, signifying, womanism and the blues can come together at a mythopoeic crossroads.

3.3.1. Blues Women as 'Race Women'

That the jazz sphere constitutes a primarily masculine aesthetic domain is an established fact for scholars. The hyper-masculinity (often combined with hyper-heterosexuality) of its players has been instrumental for the shaping of the canon. As David Ake writes,

> Though perceptions of the genre are changing, jazz has been, since its earliest days, an overwhelmingly male domain. As such, it has served to create and recreate notions of manhood for its participants . . . It is neither coincidental nor insignificant that jazz and heterosexual prowess are two of the few areas in which black males have been perceived to be superior to their white counterparts. (1998: 27)

In Part 4 we shall attend to how the Great Man Theory functions within the jazz mythistory, empowering and reinforcing a received history that resists undertaking a feminist scope from which to interpret women's contribution to the music. But for the unquestioned genius of a select few „Great Women' (often epitomized by Billie Holliday, Sarah Vaughn and Mary Lou Williams), jazz was the sporting arena of black men.

Since the late 1970s, however, and due to the influence of Radical Feminism, Cultural Feminism, Black Nationalism and Black Feminism, there is one era that scholars have increasingly sought to reinvent through feminist critique: the classical blues of the 1920s. Sung primarily by women, the performances were carried out in rural ambiences through the circuit organization of the Theater Owners Booking Association (TOBA) as complementary acts to medicine shows, minstrelsy, etc., and became highly popular when they reached the more sophisticated urban environment, particularly Memphis (which, although geographically set in the South, provided the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the Northern cities), New York and Chicago. In spite of the homogeneous characteristics that encircle all the 1920s classic blues women, their personal qualities and their performances has allowed a unique, individual appreciation of how each contributed to the blues idiom. The style of Ma Rainey, the „Mother of the Blues,' for example, answered to a more country, rural sound, while Bessie Smith, the „Empress of the Blues,' and Ida Cox developed a more refined, cosmopolitan style. Other levels include the cabaret style of Alberta Hunter, the urban vaudeville of Sara Martin, or the rural vaudeville of Trixie Smith. These are just a few names of the hundreds of African American women who pursued a singing career in the 1920s. During the Depression, most of them passed into oblivion, and some tried to adapt their art to new commercial demands. Yet their accomplishments never gained as much sensation as they had had in the preceding decade; the 1920s represents their truest legacy not only because of their aesthetic achievement, but also because they were among the first who opened the door to commercialism and the professionalization of African American art.

The classical blues period is the only epoch in jazz and blues history that has been solely dominated by the success of women. Contrary to the commercial triumph of Holiday or Williams, whose talent sprouted along with that of male soloists, composers or arrangers, the classical blues can emphatically be regarded as the golden age of female singers. Men also appeared as singers, but the overwhelming presence of women has ultimately made the classical blues an essentially female art. Short-lived as it was (during the 1930s commercial interest would shift to the more earthy male country blues),[39] the classical blues not only marked a turning point for African Americans in

[39] The post-World War II years marked the beginning of what would later be termed as men's country blues. These musicians were generally from the Mississippi Delta region; they belonged to the

the music industry, but it also provided a vast body of songs where the morality and identity of the Southern agricultural community could be researched and reconstructed. Blues women became the quintessential emissaries of Southern working-class consciousness with a repertory where raw realism intermingled with irony, performative subtleties and other forms of signifying that absorbed and articulated the psychological, social, and economic concern of the individual. Natural to the aesthetic was an understanding of plurality inherent to the singularity of the singer; that is, the blues woman, a shaman-like figure, was conceived by her people as a medium through which the troubles and hardships of the race were identified, named, and challenged.

We must keep in mind that during the 1920s, the kind of black feminism that was being endorsed was that propounded by the charismatic Oberlin College

---

Southern rural environment scarred by racism, segregation, and impoverishment. The country blues' potential for commercialism, however, was not acknowledged until after World War II, and especially, during the 1950s and the 1960s, when blues revival enthusiasts resuscitated the 1930s and 1940s recordings of Robert Johnson, Charley Patton, Skip James, Son House, and the more urbane Muddy Waters, among others. From these names, it was the by then deceased Robert Johnson who reached epic status through his 1936 and 1937 recordings. Folklorists and revivalists found in Johnson the archetype of the frontiersman and the soul of a poet. Johnson's music represented, for them, the unprocessed subjectivity of a man who was a dissenter within America's social and political 'progresses,' and who yet refrained to counteract through direct political protest. His songs, according to revivalists, responded by returning to basic human emotions, to the tragedies and the good times resulting from a direct connection with the immediate environment. Douglass Henry Daniels states that in this preparatory phase towards the Civil Rights movement,

> There are no songs which counsel blacks to resist oppression through violent struggle. The reworked spirituals of the 1960s, the civil rights songs, were part of a protest movement, but a non-violent one – non-violent for the activists, that is. This alone should remind us of the humanistic core in the Afro-American heritage and the kinds of values it perpetuates. (1985: 18)

Revivalists found Southern musicians' songs from two or three decades earlier uninterested in violent, political scrambles. They were artists concerned with "personal expression over money" and "freedom over conformity" (Daniel 1985: 18). The hostile Delta atmosphere had provided the male blues singer a cruder acoustic sound, one that was disentangled from urban distractions. All in all, the country blues man was the rural counterpart to the city's bebopper, who was the romanticized urban outsider of the beatnick and hipster movement.

spokeswoman, Mary Church Terrell (1863-1944), and Fannie Barrier Williams (1855-1944). Their Northern perspectives of the elevation of the race went hand in hand with that of the elevation of the black woman, in an effort to emphasize on her virtue as a mother and as a domestic provider for the family. Thus, although changes in the black woman's public sphere were considerable in the North (primarily on the basis of education), the private sphere remained an immaculate space for the reproduction of the woman's natural role under patriarchal terms. Appealing from the standpoint of one of the most educated women in the country, Terrell expressed in her speeches for black women's club movements that it was in the interest of the race to educate black women. In June 1893, she published an article entitled "What the Colored Women's League Will Do" in which she stated:

> A national organization of colored women could accomplish so much in a variety of ways that thoughtful, provident women are strenuously urging their sisters all over the country to cooperate with them in this important matter . . . There is every reason for all who have the interest of the race at heart to associate themselves with the League, so that there may be a vast chain of organizations extending the length and breadth of the land devising ways and needs to advance our cause. We have always been equal to the highest emergencies in the past and it remains for us now to prove to the world that we are a unit in all matters pertaining to the education and elevation of our race. (2005: 186)

These sorts of organizations and club movements constituted almost a world apart from the reality of the lower African American caste of the South, still immersed in the aftermath of slavery and for the most part oblivious to these Northern associations fighting for equality and suffrage. The Church had a powerful influence over the black population in the South, but morality could not be read under the same terms that Terrell was claiming. Morality had to be coherent with survival skills, wit, and street smarts that often did not correspond to Christian values. Theirs was a different reality, one that involved a daily quest to survive in the post-bellum South, and one where prison, lynching, verbal abuse, and humiliation required a more speedy solution than State and Congress support could provide. Even the Mississippian Ida B. Wells (1862-1931), raised in an atmosphere of devastating poverty, who went on to become one of the most active warriors in the cause against lynching and in the women's rights movement, abandoned the South and left to Chicago to continue her provocative writing

and activism. After three close friends of hers were lynched and the headquarters of her Memphis newspaper, *The Free Speech*, were attacked and burnt to the ground, Wells pursued her mission not only in the North, but in England as well, where the death threats she had received could not reach her.

The conflict of interests between Northern club women and Southern working-class women explains the latter's fertility as a symbol of „the people.' It is necessary to stress the value of these singers as „race women' before we venture into the feminist perspective. In the previous chapter, I referred to Sterling A. Brown's poem as an aesthetic, multi-vocal reconfiguration of the signifying patterns involved in the blues. If we read carefully, we find that this multi-vocality is illustrated as a network connecting Southern individuals, regardless of sex. For Brown, Ma Rainey erects herself not as a feminist icon, but as a race woman; she is the vessel for the entire community, and there is not a single hint in the poem to indicate that the singer reserves any sort of performative space for female concerns. Generally, in literature, male writers have recurrently used blues women as characters or motifs to denounce racial discrimination. By adapting the mythical potential of the singers to the historical and intellectual context of the writer, blues women have become emblems of endurance and perseverance for the entire working-class black group. The problem is that the hardships of the group are defined by male standards, thus limiting the scope to racial and economic issues while ignoring sex and gender-based complexities.

More than thirty years after Brown published "Ma Rainey," Amiri Baraka's highly controversial play *Dutchman* (1964) recuperated the image of Bessie Smith as a race woman through allusions made by the main character, Clay. Baraka's more militant approach represents the transition from the Civil Rights to Black Nationalism, a transition marked by the influence of Hegelian and Marxist dialectics, and by the vehement discourse adopted by Malcolm X in his speeches. In Baraka's view, the black individual has been alienated from his culture and is tragically immersed in a struggle towards the assimilation of white middle-class values. This breach between the psyche and the race's history and culture leads to neither solace nor completion of identity. Instead, identity is violently fragmented and the black individual cannot acknowledge himself in his work or in his lifestyle. Baraka, who had been raised in a middle-class African American family in Newark, found himself during the 1960s reacting against the values in which he had been bred, rejecting mainstream institutions and speech

which answered to white middle-class expectations. As he saw it, the middle-class African American was erroneously imitating those values, betraying his own culture by assimilating multiple layers of masks to define negritude. A year before *Dutchman* was published and staged, Baraka wrote in *Blues People* that

> The middle-class black man . . . developed an emotional allegiance to the middle-class (middle-brow) culture of America that obscured, or actually made hideous, any influences or psychological awareness that seemed to come from outside what was generally acceptable to a middle-class white man, especially if those influences were identifiable as coming from the most despised group in the country. (2002: 132)

Influenced by Sterling A. Brown, who was his professor at Howard University, Baraka envisioned black music as an aesthetic that encodes the emotional history and the culture of negritude in America. While Brown, as we have seen, aimed to recuperate the blues idiom as a valuable idiomatic treasure of the race, Baraka reached even further to provoke not only a re-examination of the heritage, but a cultural revolution. According to Maurice A. Lee, Baraka sought to take Marxism into praxis, beyond the Civil Right Movement's use of it as a mere theory, by way of "calling for more aggressive action from black leaders and decrying the inability of all lower class people to start their own revolution in America" (2004: 102). Jazz and the blues harbor the facet of black culture untainted by the white middle class; they are cryptograms ciphering a black culture that reacts against the mainstream. If well interpreted, they can lead to a revolution of the masses to subvert race and class hierarchies.

This revolutionary message is the one that Clay tries to convey in *Dutchman.* Set in a New York subway car, the play depicts how Clay, a young middle-class African American, is seduced and humiliated by Lula, a white woman, who ultimately sentences him to death on the hands of the rest of the passengers. The flirtatious and aggressive Lula debases Clay's middle-class image by conjuring all the racist stereotypes concerning black masculinity – from the myth of the black rapist to that of the emasculated black man. As his name suggests, Clay is „molded' into grotesque „nigger' stereotypes through Lula's manipulative language. Towards the end of the second scene, Lula's verbal harassment finally unleashes Clay's fury. He slaps Lula around the car and bursts into a speech where he conjures Bessie Smith:

> You don't know anything except what's there for you to see. An act. Lies. Device. Not the pure heart, the pumping black heart . . . Old bald-headed four-eyed ofays popping their fingers… and don't know yet what they're doing. They say, "I love Bessie Smith." and don't even understand that Bessie Smith is saying, "Kiss my ass, kiss my black unruly ass." Before love, suffering, desire, anything you can explain, she's saying, and very plainly, "Kiss my black ass." And if you don't know that, it's you that's doing the kissing. (2003: 2312)

Clay is alluding to the cryptic, signifying quality of black music, forever inaccessible to whites because of their impossibility to ever grasp or understand the cultural significance of the black experience in America. Bessie incarnates the trickster who deceives white domination by letting them onto the game of interpreting her music under Eurocentric standards. In the same way that Lula is thrashing onto Clay what black masculinity means to her (and by extension, to all white institutions), white bohemians from the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s (such as we have seen in the case of Carl Van Vechten) had created out of the black songstress a mask with which they felt comfortable with, one where exoticism and primitivism were embedded within the high art / popular culture dichotomy. Through Clay's speech, Baraka is warning his black audience and readers that they should not fall prey to the white opinions and images of Bessie Smith, that her message went beyond what the white public could and can fathom, and that this very message has immediate relevance to their own lives, as individuals and as a community. William J. Harris notes that in Baraka's work, "the creation of black identity cannot be arbitrary: there must be something real behind the ideal, a cultural continuity" (2004: 318). That „realness' is the belief that black culture needs to rid itself from the suffocating, brainwashing influence of the white upper and middle class, both in the aesthetic and in the socio-political sphere. The „continuity' should not be broken by the black middle class and its rejection of folk music.

Following the previous excerpt, Clay continues his speech by calling forth another jazz legend: "Charlie Parker? Charlie Parker. All the hip white boys scream for Bird. And Bird saying, „Up your ass, feeble-minded ofay!' Up your ass." And they sit there talking about the tortured genius of Charlie Parker" (Baraka 2003: 2312). Smith and Parker stand under equal terms for Clay and for Baraka: they are race icons, oddly enough very popular among the white avant-garde circles. While Smith was sought by rich white socialites such as Carl Van Vechten, we have seen how Parker became the perfect martyr to support the hipster and Beatnick ideology. Beneath this popularity,

Clay states, there breathes an immense amount of hatred in each of them, a hatred that can only be appeased through the utilization of music as its metaphor.

Baraka, however, reveals his ambivalence about the purpose of black music as metaphor of violence. Clay heatedly tells Lula that "Bird would've played not a note of music if he just walked up to East Sixty-seventh Street and killed the first ten white people he saw" (Baraka 2003: 2312). He equally refers to Smith's persona when shortly after he says that

> If Bessie Smith had killed some white people she wouldn't have needed that music. She could have talked very straight and plain about the world. No metaphors. No grunts. No wiggles in the dark of her soul. Just straight two and two are tour. Money. Power. Luxury. Like that. All of them. Crazy niggers turning their backs on sanity. When all it needs is that simple act. Murder. Just murder! Would make us all sane. (Baraka 2003: 2313)

In this scope, black music as a metaphor for violence is an unnecessary shield, a buffering zone for repressed emotions. Smith and Parker succeed in making great art out of their anger, but are unable to go beyond the music and take action. David Ikard pointed out Baraka's enigmatic position when he wrote that in the play "Smith is not a true revolutionary . . . because she is not „manly' enough to express her feelings openly and strike down her oppressors" (2007: 12). But if Smith and Parker are criticized for their lack of revolutionary action, Clay's unleash of violence, his revolutionary praxis, only leads him to his death. When he finally extricates his own language from "metaphors" and "grunts," when he is emotionally empowered, all Lula has to do is to finish him off. The colloquialism and simplicity of her sentencing words ("all right") only render Clay as a helpless, pathetic puppet whose greatest moment proved futile. White supremacy can crush these empowered black men in a matter of minutes, without even the need of acquiring a more belligerent language to annihilate them; their incompetence as enemies makes them unworthy of even sentencing them through a more formal discourse. Clay is stabbed in the chest; he is frontally attacked and he never sees it coming. In just a few seconds his body is dragged down the aisle and thrown out the coach. Dispensing of a black man's life and body need not be more complicated.

3.3.2. Shug Avery and the Signifying Rhetoric of the Blues

Having viewed the male-centered approaches to blues women in the line of Brown or Baraka, we can now posit the following questions: how is the blues woman divested of this masculinist appeal? Does a feminist critique of the classical blues imply a sexualization of race and/or a racialization of sex? What elements of signifying are involved in a feminist (and more specifically, in Walker's) development of the blues singer? How do these elements endorse strictly feminist archetypes and how are they mythopoeic? Let us address these issues as we deconstruct the womanist and feminist characteristics that are contained within the character of Shug Avery.

Considering the material and existential differences separating the Southern African American women from their Northern sisters, it is no wonder that there was little room for talk of elevating black women in the South. However, Walker initiated a trend in the reinvention of blues women as bearers of feminist sentiment through *The Color Purple*. Structured in the form of letters, the novel depicts the path towards the assertiveness and economic and emotional independence of Celie, a poor black Southern girl. Celie is brutally raped by a man whom she believes is her father at a young age; she is twice impregnated and the father, Alphonso, gives the babies away. Her mother having passed away, Celie can only find support in the loving arms of her sister, Nettie. Mr. _____, a widower with four children at his care, arrives one day at the household asking for Nettie's hand, but the father turns him down, offering him to marry the by-now-sterile Celie instead. What follows are years of physical and psychological abuse for Celie at a male supremacist homestead. Nettie runs away from Alphonso but is soon vanished by Mr. _____ at her determined refusal to have intercourse with him, and the sisters promise to write to each other. The years wear Celie out; she becomes even more silent and introverted. Deprived of her voicedness, her only medium for expression are the letters that we read, addressed to God at the futility of not having an address where Nettie can be reached. Neither does Celie receive any letters from Nettie. Devastated by the uncertainty of her sister's whereabouts or well-being, and traumatized by the continual abuse at the hands of Mr. _____ and his wild children, Celie suffers in the quietude of her fragmented self.

Her healing process begins with the appearance of two strong female characters: Sofia, the amazon who weds Mr. _____'s son, Harpo, and Shug Avery. Shug, who is

a blues singer, has been Mr. _____'s lover for years, and despite the fact that she scorns him for not having considered the possibility of marrying her and disobeying his father's wishes, she continues her sexual entanglements with him. But Shug's sexual relationship with Mr. _____ (whom she calls by his first name, Albert), is far from destructive; unlike the relationship between Celie and Mr. _____, there is not a trace of patriarchal domination between Shug and Albert. Rather, the opposite system is operative: Shug erupts into the household and subverts the hierarchies that had, until then, governed and justified Celie's abuse. Mr. _____ grovels at Shug's feet; her every wish is his command. The first hints that Mr. _____ might be capable of love are given. The sassy and hip-swinging Shug initiates Celie in a therapeutic journey of self-discovery as she teaches her how to embrace the pleasures of the flesh as much as how to spiritually embrace God, nature, and love. Although Celie also finds inspiration in the robust Sofia, who, because she refuses to be annulled by domestic beatings has left Harpo, Shug reaches her at a womanist level. Furthermore, Sofia's strength turns to ashes when she is arrested. Having retorted her signature phrase, "Hell no!" at the request of the Mayor's wife, who had asked for her services as a domestic hand, Sofia responds to her husband's slap with a fist punch. The following years are a painful decline for Sofia, as she is forced to work as a maid at the Mayor's house as the alternative sentence to jail.

By the time Sofia is working as a servant, Shug has not only gained nationwide popularity as a singer, but has married a young man by the name of Grady, which is as hard a blow for Mr. _____ as it is for Celie. On one of her visits from Memphis, Celie opens up to her about her childhood molestation; Shug, who is moved to tears, kisses her and they make love. When Celie and Shug discover that Mr. _____ has been hiding the letters from Nettie all those years, Celie volcanically confronts her husband for the first time in her life. Her empowered hatred is symbolically represented through her awareness of her long-silenced word:

> I curse you, I say.
>
> What that mean? he say.
>
> I say, Until you do right by me, everything you touch will crumble.
>
> He laugh. Who you think you is? He say. You can't curse nobody. Look at you. You black, you pore, you ugly, you a woman. Goddam, he say, you nothing at all.

> Until you do right by me, I say, everything you even dream about will fail. I give it to him straight, just like it come to me. And it seem to come to me from the trees. (2003: 209)[40]

Unlike Clay's self-condemnation through the unleashing of his words in *Dutchman*, Celie's curse represents the first conquered stage towards independence and agency. The cycle is far from complete, however, for as Cutter has noted, "Walker is not content with showing Celie's use of ‚the master's tools' against the master. Celie must learn that language can be used to understand, rather than destroy, another's subjectivity" (2008: 153). Shug has intitated Celie in the use of language as weaponry; however, her final objective is to show her to use her discourse in constructive terms. The womanist in Shug, which is germinating in Celie, seeks independence and self-love, but not through the oppression of up-down hierarchical binarisms, as I will later on argue, but through the transcendence of them. A womanist's preference of the female culture does not imply subdual of the other sex, for above all, a womanist is a universalist.

Celie, who has now learned that Nettie is a missionary for the Olinka people in Africa and is taking care of Celie's long-lost children, and that their actual father was not Alphonso, but a businessman who was tragically lynched, goes with Shug, Grady, and Harpo's second wife, Squeak (Mary Agnes) to Memphis to gather her strength. Shug and Celie live as lovers, and while Shug is on the road, Celie finds her professional calling in the designing and making of pants for men and women alike, calling her company Folkspants, Unlimited. Alphonso dies and Celie inherits his house, which had actually legally belonged to her actual father. Her happiness, however, becomes clouded when Shug leaves her for Germaine, a nineteen-year-old blues flute player. In the months that follow, she awaits for Shug to return to her, and in the meantime, she befriends Mr. _____, who has turned his life (and himself) around. Celie's curse had actually become Mr. _____'s salvation: he has not only learned to appreciate women and repented for his treatment of Celie, but has also come to accept his feminine side: his womanist appreciation of nature comes in the form of collecting seashells, and he joins Celie as a seamstress after she teaches him to sew and make clothes in accordance to each person's physique, attitude, and needs.

After having made amends with one of her sons in the West, Shug leaves Germaine and returns to Celie. The novel symbolically closes on a Fourth of July, when

[40] Hereafter all citations from *The Color Purple* will be indicated solely through page number.

Shug, Celie, Mr _____ (who Celie now calls Albert), Harpo, Sofia, Mary Agnes and the children prepare to celebrate each other. As they are getting ready, an automobile approaches, and Nettie, Celie's children, Olivia and Adam, Adam's African wife, Tashi, and Nettie's husband, Samuel, appear. After more than thirty years, the sisters are reunited.

Within this account, it is Shug who guides Celie towards the affirmation of herself, hinting that liberation must begin in language, and must continue through the acceptance and love of God through „Its' creation, including herself. The novel's opening epigraph is a quotation by Stevie Wonder: "Show me how to do like you / Show me how to do it," and indeed, the relationship between Shug and Celie is one that begins in imitation, transforms into a highly personal form of the master / disciple archetypes, and ends in their sublime mergence as one. The first time Shug enters into Celie's life is through a picture that Mr. _____ accidentally drops from his wallet at Alphonso's house. It is significant that already from this image, the tragic and the comic aspects of the blues idiom somehow profess their presence. Celie is completely blown away by Shug's image:

> [Shug Avery was] the most beautiful woman I ever saw. She more pretty than my mama. She bout ten thousand times more prettier than me. I see her there in furs. Her face rouge. Her hair like somethin tail. She grinning with her foot up on somebody motorcar. Her eyes serious tho. Sad some. (6)

Her mimicry of Shug takes place when she dresses up like her to deviate Alphonso's attention from Nettie, trying to allure him to protect her sister from his incestuous drive. Like the Signifying Monkey, Celie succeeds in tricking the „master,' although at the expense of her own body and spirit: "He beat me for dressing trampy but he do it to me anyway" (7). The image also offers Celie a sense of resignation to some of the tragic experiences that are bound to happen in life. When Mr. _____ gives in to marrying her, she takes out the picture. "I look into her eyes. Her eyes say Yeah, it bees that way sometime" (8). It will take some time for Celie to come to the realization of that message, for it is not quite resignation what Shug conveys, but endurance within the contesting, adverse situations. Ironically, it is through Alphonso that Walker hints the signifying qualities contained within Celie. When Alphonso hands her to Mr. _____, he warns him that "she tell lies" (8). Neither Alphonso nor Celie are aware of the

implicit message in this statement, through which Walker is most likely indicating Celie's potential to signify, to reverse given hierarchical orders through the mastery of language. It must be through the lessons taught by Shug that Celie will find her signifying self. In the words of Hortense Spillers, "the black woman must translate the female vocalist's gestures into an apposite structure of terms that will articulate both her kinship to other women and the particular nuances of her own experience" (2003: 167). This signifying self is construed by Walker in feminist and womanist terms through the blues discourse.

Precisely what are the womanist features that Walker sees are embedded within the blues? A surface reading of a survey of classical blues lyrics will indicate that the speaker often appears in the form of a victim of physical and psychological abuse. I referred earlier to the adherence of lyrics to tragedy; from the woman's standpoint, this tragedy is usually illustrated in the form of beatings, masochism, willingness to be „played' by a man, sense of abandonment, loneliness, suicidal and murderous instincts, asphyxiating rage, relief through alcoholism, or just plain depression. Yet Shug personifies the opposite values: strength, agency, verbosity, autonomy, independence, and free will, and she does so primarily through her vociferous enjoyment of sex, a claim that, as we have seen, places her at a significant distance from the black women's club movements of the North. When the relationship between Celie and Shug turns from one of visual mimicry to one of friendship between master and disciple, the most important lesson Celie learns is about the pleasures of sex. Having known no other form of intercourse than rape and the numbness of lying beneath Mr. _____ (Celie describes it to Shug as Mr. _____ doing "his business" (78) on top of her, as if defecating), the severance between body and spirit has alienated her completely from her female biology. Shug hands Celie a mirror and orders her to look for her "button":

> I lie back on the bed and haul up my dress. Yank down my bloomers. Stick the looking glass tween my legs. Ugh. All that hair. Then my pussy lips be black. Then inside look like a wet rose.
>
> It a lot prettier than you thought, ain't it? she say from the door.
>
> It mine, I say. Where the button?
>
> Right up near the top, she say. That part that stick out a little.
>
> I look at her and touch it with my finger. A little shiver go through me. Nothing much. But just enough to tell me this the right button to mash. Maybe.

> She say, While you looking, look at your titties too. I haul up my dress and look at my titties. Think bout my babies sucking them. Remember the little shiver I felt then too. Sometimes a big shiver. Best part about having the babies was feedin' them. (79)

Shug shows Celie how to invert traditional conceptions of sex as an instrument through which to subdue women. It is evident that such a patriarchal exploitation of the woman's body has led Celie to annul herself: until this moment, her body has been objectified and abused, and her mind silenced. By calling her clitoris her own, Celie is not only discovering her body, she is also possessing it; transforming from an object to a subject, from the possessed to the possessor. Shug does not theorize about the liberating qualities intrinsic to sexuality; she merely teaches Celie that pleasure can induce agency. Shug, like Janie in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, suggests that freedom to choose one's sexual partner, freedom to enjoy and rejoice in one's body, and freedom to find beauty in it enable a purely black feminist scope through which to counteract the tragedy of life with celebration of the self. Walker's Signifiyin(g) on Hurston and her characters through the blues women is intentional. In *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*, she writes that:

> Zora Neale Hurston, Billie Holiday, and Bessie Smith form a sort of unholy trinity. Zora *belongs* in the tradition of black women singers . . . There were the extreme highs and lows of her life, her undaunted pursuit of adventure, passionate emotional and sexual experience, and her love of freedom. Like Billie and Bessie she followed her own road, believed in her own gods, pursued her own dreams, and refused to separate herself from the „common' people. (1983: 91)

In the same way that Janie asserts herself through her tumultuous, yet ultimately constructive, relationship with Tea Cake, so does Shug stand emblematically as the womanist that, in the eyes of Walker, impregnated the spirits of Hurston, Holiday and Smith.

In a later passage, Celie describes Shug as a beautiful "big rose" (197), using the same flowery imagery through which she had described her genitalia. The connection between Shug and female sexual organs is one that stems from the rich allegorical imagery of classical blues songs through which singers referred to their own (and men's) body parts. These metaphors were understood by the audience, for they were part of the African American vernacular discourse. They were recurrent images that

attested not only to the uniqueness and versatility of black speech modes, but to its position inside a mostly oral culture, where phrases and metaphors were methodologically borrowed and transmitted from one musician to the other. Female sexual organs were often referred to as ‚cabbage,' ‚cake,' and ‚pie,' while men's attributes were designated through ‚bacon,' ‚lemon,' ‚hot dog,' and ‚jellybean.' In "Empty Bed Blues, Part 2" Bessie Smith sang:

> He boiled my first cabbage and he made it awful hot
> When he put in the bacon, it overflowed the pot. (B. Smith 1993c)

In another Bessie Smith classic, "I'm Wild About That Thing," the speaker, like Shug, openly discusses the female ‚button':

> What's the matter, papa, please don't stall
> Don't you know I love it and I want it all
> I'm wild about that thing
> Just give my bell a ring
> You can press that button, I'm wild about that thing (B. Smith 1993b)

Using Shug as a womanist trope, Walker stands her ground that through the affirmation of the body and the senses as a physical extension of the soul, the black woman can divest herself of the collective trauma of rape (as institutionalized by slavery) and objectification (in the hands of male partners) and come to possess her individual body. Hazel Carby has subsequently written that:

> What has been called the ‚Classic Blues' . . . is a discourse that articulates a cultural and political struggle that is directed against the objectification of female sexuality within a patriarchal order but which also tries to reclaim women's bodies as the sexual and sensuous subjects of women's song. (1998: 472)

Carby goes on to add that "[blues singers] are representations of women who attempt to manipulate and control their construction as sexual subjects" (1998: 473). The emphasis on sensuality is one that contravenes male supremacy in that it aims for agency and autonomy.

Shug could not have come to life as anything other than a blues singer. Her profession requires that she be open about her sexuality, an openness which

undoubtedly would have clashed with the 1920s black women's club movement of the North and their advocacy on the moral virtue of the African American female. It is not lost on Celie that the church-going community shuns Shug when she is sick precisely because she is an instrument of the antichrist:

> Even the preacher got his mouth on Shug Avery, now she down. He take her condition for his text. He don't call no name, but he don't have to. Everybody know who he mean. He talk bout a strumpet in short skirts, smoking cigarettes, drinking gin. Singing for money and taking other women mens. Talk bout slut, hussy, heifer and streetcleaner. (44).

For Walker to have made a case of the blues woman as a feminist is to have struggled against the past (black feminism in the 1920s) and against the present (the negative masculine and feminine stereotypes against which the 1970s Black Nationalism constructed an identity based on hyper-masculinity and hyper-heterosexuality). She negotiates with male writers who have found in blues singers their potency to stand as race women and carves out a new symbolic dimension from which to interpret the sexual politics permeating their discourse. We have to be aware that this is not at all a simple argument to foster. The first time that Shug appears singing in public is to perform Bessie Smith's "A Good Man Is Hard To Find." Walker does not quote the lyrics, which are as follows:

> My heart is sad and I'm all alone
> My man's treating me mean
> I regret the day that I was born
> And the man I ever seen
>
> My happiness is less today
> My heart is broke, that's why I say
> Lord, a good man is hard to find
> You always get another kind
>
> Just when you think that he's your pal
> You look and find him foolin' 'round some other gal
> Then you rave, you all crave
> You want to see him in his grave
>
> So if you man is nice, take my advice;
> Hug him in the morning, kiss him at night
> Give him plenty lovin'; treat your good man right . . . (B. Smith 1997)

In the line of most classical blues themes, "A Good Man Is Hard To Find" initially presents the woman as a victim of the man's wrongdoings. The speaker masochistically indulges in her pain and her ill luck. She even suggests that she may be the one to blame, as she has not satisfied her partner domestically, and offers advice to women on how to keep their men interested. All in all, it conveys a series of male-supremacist ideas: the woman is worthless without a man by her side; she is miserable because she is incapable of living autonomously and the only way reach fulfillment (that is, to keep one's man) is by acting the role of the female / lover / nurturer. Not only are these the words to the song Shug sings, but she sings them for Mr. _____, as if letting him know all the pain he caused her when he refused to marry her. The next song in her repertory, which, to Celie's delight, is dedicated to her, is also about a no-good man, however. From the other Bessie Smith songs I have quoted above a parallel dependency from the man could be interpreted; the woman cannot be liberated sexually unless there is an experienced man to stimulate her.

But to focus on a surface reading leads to miscomprehending the signifying nature of the blues and, by extension, to a misinterpretation of Shug. Regardless that many women's blues, such as the examples above, enhance masculine prowess, the fact that the speaker is openly expressing how satisfied and fulfilled she feels thanks to her bedmate's talents renders her as an autonomous subject. By confirming that sex is pleasurable and by affirming her right to enjoy it, the speaker reasserts the connection between physical and emotional fulfillment. Carby is just one of the scholars to have constructed a sociological model of feminist critique in which to inscribe the kind of blues agency that Walker delineated through Shug. Angela Davis's seminal study, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism* (1998), most notably, can be credited as the most solid and persuasive work to squeeze from the classical blues discourse a feminist (or pre-feminist) indication. In her words, "the blues woman challenges in her own way the imposition of gender-based inferiority. When she paints blues portraits of tough women, she offers psychic defenses and interrupts and discredits the routine internalization of male dominance" (Davis 1998: 36). Throughout the book, Davis continues to invoke the signifying powers of blues women to allude to the double-voicedness of their discourse. The moans and groans as much as the ironic inflexions of tone performed by the singers appear as indications that they are parodying their own words, conveying a different

message for the women in the audience who identify with the abuse and ailments depicted in the lyrics.

We must be careful, nonetheless, in examining Shug's signifying through song: not only are her songs not quoted (the result being that the contesting game between lyrics and attitude is somewhat shadowed) but Celie is disheartened by the fact that Shug looks at Mr. _____ throughout her performance of "A Good Man Is Hard To Find," which indicates that Celie is herself unfamiliar with double-voicedness. Towards the end of the novel, Celie does regard Shug's performances as an art of indirection, and it is because of this that Shug refuses to let her go on the road with her: "She can act like she not bored in front of a audience of strangers, a lot of them white," Celie writes, "but she wouldn't have the nerve to try to act in front of me" (214). As readers familiarized with the tradition of signifying in the blues, and because of this last remark, we are aware that Shug's singing is one that involves the double discourse of the Signifying Monkey. But Shug's relationship to the Esu deity is one that is more transparently expressed through her everyday attitude than through song. It is striking that being as empowered through the blues as Shug is, Walker grants very little space for Celie to write about her performances. Moreover, Shug's blunt and straightforward language initially presents a contradiction to motivated and unmotivated signification; for she means exactly what she says and makes nothing of circumlocutions, euphemisms or indirect forms of persuasion. Thomas Marvin has established the connections between Shug and the orisha god Legba (Esu) on the basis of the use of *nommo*, an African discursive technique whereupon the speaker gains power over the thing it names directly:

> The sometimes bewildering lyrics of many blues songs can be understood more fully in the context of West African philosophy, which views the cosmos as an intricate network of spiritual and physical forces in which intelligent beings, or *Muntu*, exert their power over lower forms of life through *nommo*. (1994: 412)

Indeed, *nommo* presents a viable way through which to salvage a feminist critique, one that has as well been used by Davis in her argumentation. Likewise, Daphne Duval Harrison finds that many classical blues songs seek the healing of the collective black female consciousness by "identifying the source of pain, acknowledging its effects, then taking a step to deal with it" (2000: 101). Many songs, therefore, become "purgative," a

form of "aesthetic therapy" (Harrison 2000: 101). In this way, a critic may provide an argument for a feminist construction of Shug that always conjures some mythical referent: when her language is indirect (when she is singing), she resembles the Signifying Monkey, and when her language is direct, she resembles Esu and his control of lower beings through direct calling of their names. While it is not my intention to discredit Walker's character, I believe it is necessary to understand the cultural constructs that are at play in the development of a supposed feminist principle of the 1920s classical blues. The identification of these constructs, which are contradictory in nature but naturalized through the compatibility with which they appear in the novel, provides us with very telling insight into the mythopoeic possibilities that writers can endow historical figures with, shaping them and molding them into symbolizing a set of values that gives form and order to the disconnected direction of history.

Walker's transformation of chaos into cosmos through the blues discourse reaches beyond the establishment of a signifying tradition between Afro-American texts. Her negotiation with Hurston, the blues singers, and male writers such as Brown or Baraka extends enough to include post-Radical and Cultural feminist values. In his essay, Marvin, like other critics before and after him, refers to Shug as a unifying entity. Within her persona, binarisms are presented and destroyed. Particularly, he is interested in the manner by which Shug "crosses the boundaries which usually separate the sacred and the profane by bringing the spiritual power of music to her ostensibly secular performances" (1994: 414-415). Indeed, it is significant that although she is shunned by the church, Shug is the one who instructs Celie in the acceptance of God. The „blues God' has no iconography other than its creation, including the self. The old, white-maned, white man of the Bible is symbolically slain by Shug from Celie's spiritual universe. Instead, she tells her to concentrate on the trees, the sky, the rocks, the people, and the color purple in the fields, for that is where she will find what she is looking for: "God ain't a he or a she," Shug says, "but a It" (196). Shug recognizes the Eurocentric God as a cultural construct of man, and like Hurston, she makes a god of her own:

> Man corrupt everything, say Shug. He on your box of grits, in your head, and all over the radio. He try to make you think he everywhere. Soon as you think he everywhere, you think he God. But he ain't. Whenever you trying to pray, and man plop himself on the other end of it, tell him to git lost, say Shug. Conjure up flowers, wind, water, a big rock. (198)

Shug is unwelcomed in the church, yet she practices her own religion, one that begins in the self (the body and the soul) and is metonymically extended to the rest of the sexless (or doubly sexed) creatures created by God. Shug is as well an emissary of „the devil's music,' the blues. In a significant passage, Celie retells how Shug tries to persuade Squeak (Mary Agnes) to take up blues singing:

> I tell you something else, Shug say to Mary Agnes, listening to you sing, folks git to thinking bout a good screw.
>
> Aw, *Miss Shug*, say Mary Agnes, changing color.
>
> Shug say, What, too shamefaced to put singing and fucking together? She laugh. That's the reason they call what us sing the devil's music. Devils love to fuck. (117)

In the previous chapter, I explained a number of interpretations that have been given to Robert Johnson's "Crossroad Blues," and how one of them was that Johnson was singing about the moment he sold his soul to the Devil. Indeed, there is a longstanding tradition of the Devil as character in both classical and country blues (Albert Murray even traces the origin of the term „blues' to the English expression „blue devils'). That the Devil appears in the form of a character in the song (either as the Devil or as the blues as a personified, tricky entity) attests to the strong bonds between the music and the oral culture where it was bred and where hundreds of oral narratives featured the Devil as its trickster of choice. But within the blues sphere, the music itself was an indication of moral deviancy, one that added to the pariah qualities of the singer. Davis enumerates the main social structures that viewed the blues woman as an outcast: "belittled and misconstrued by the dominant culture that has been incapable of deciphering the secrets of her art," she claims, "she has been ignored and denounced by African American middle-class circles and repudiated by the most authoritative institution in her own community, the church" (1998: 124-125). Despite the fact that blues lyrics also often turned to God in preaching-like pleas and prayers, the abounding content on matters of the flesh no doubt alarmed religious institutions and followers. The blues must to some extent have been deemed a stigma by those artists who turned to the church in later years: Ma Rainey and Ethel Waters both sacrificed performing and dedicated themselves to religion when they became older. But Walker, through an excelling manipulation of antinomies, allows Shug to transcend the dichotomy. In the same way that in blues lyrics both the Devil and God can appear fully without implying

a moral contradiction (the contradiction is only created outside of the discourse itself, at a societal level), so can Shug materialize her life through forms that have traditionally been associated to both symbols. As a womanist, she preaches freedom, love and benevolence (God), and she can also act cruelly and be blinded by jealousy (her initial mistreatment of Celie is marked by her spite for her being Mr. _____'s wife) and follow her sexual drive (the Devil). Shug herself settles the matter through the „It' God that cherishes traditional beauty just as much as sex or other „demonic' attributes.

Walker's play with antinomies is extremely complex; while some of them appear dissolved, such as in the case of the apparently sexless God who, nonetheless, rejoices in the fact that It has created men and women who take pleasure in sex, other times antinomies do not appear melted, but juxtaposed. In these instances, plurality is celebrated, as opposed to being annihilated. What is particularly significant about this fact, I believe, is that they represent the joints in the development of Walker's cosmos, for it is in this celebration of plurality where blues women meet feminism and womanism and at the same time connect with West African mythology. Indeed, all dichotomies tend to function as tools to sustain and justify a male-centered supremacy (male / female, religious / secular, mind / body, rationality / emotion), but the solution to oppression need not always rely on the fusion between categories. Instead, juxtaposition offers transcendence through the redefining of their role as signifiers. In West African mythology, antinomies are not necessarily dissolved: the deities that gather both masculine and feminine traits, such as Esu, who often appears with a large erect penis and with female breasts, do not annul their sexuality; they are simply personifications of both. According to Gates, Esu descended from such a creature: "The primal god of the Fon is a Janus figure; one side of its body is female and is called Mawu, while the other side is male and it is called Lisa. Mawu's eyes form the moon; Lisa's eyes form the sun. Accordingly, Lisa rules the day and Mawu rules the night" (1989: 23). In a similar way, Shug symmetrically juxtaposes her traditionally female and traditionally male features. When she complements Sofia in a mannish manner, Celie notes the following:

> That when I notice how Shug talk and act sometimes like a man. Men say stuff like that to women, Girl, you look like a good time. Women always talk bout hair and health. How many babies living or dead, or got teef. Not bout how some woman they hugging on look like a good time.

> All the men got they eyes glued to Shug's bosom. I got my eyes glued there too. I feel my nipples harden under my dress. My little button sort of perk up too. Shug, I say to her in my mind, God, you looks like a real good time, the Good Lord knows you do. (82)

The first paragraph refers to her „masculinity' and the second to her „femininity' – one that arouses Celie's „masculinity.' These qualities are juxtaposed; what is destroyed is their male supremacist connotations, that is, not only the power relations they traditionally convey, but their male-centered functions as signifiers. Later in the novel, once Celie and Mr. _____ converse in friendly terms, the complexity of Walker's womanist principles on supremacist binarisms reemerges:

> Mr. _____ ast me the other day what it is I love so much about Shug. He say he love her style. He say to tell the truth, Shug act more manly than most men. I mean she upright, honest. Speak her mind and the devil take the hindmost, he say. You know Shug will fight, she say. Just like Sofia. She bound to live her life and be herself no matter what.
>
> Mr. _____ think all this stuff men do. But Harpo not like this, I tell him. You not like this. What Shug got is womanly seem like to me. (274)

Celie, as the rest of the empowered women in the novel (Shug, Sofia, Nettie, Tashi, and even Squeak, who in her own quest to becoming a womanist, sacrifices being raped in exchange to letting Sofia complete the rest of her sentence as a maid) has learned to redefine what being a black woman is and entails. Her professionalization as a seamstress of pants for both men and women must not be interpreted as a symbolic act of uniting the sexes: she makes the pants in accordance with each person's shape and spirit. Nor should it be interpreted as an attempt of making women masculine; in the same way that she admires how the Olinka wear robes and dresses regardless of sex, so does she regard the juxtaposition of women and pants as a way to implode the associations between supremacy and male clothing (and by extension, male attitudes). In other words, she continues to separate the two sexes, but classifies their attributes in a way that is not only more becoming to their nature, but that destroys the power relations they traditionally connoted.

The juxtaposition of binarisms is distinctly a womanist principle. Contrary to latter feminist critiques of blues women, juxtaposing presupposes a commitment to the freedom of the individual. Carby, Davis, and Harrison have commented on the amount of classical blues songs (in their majority, of a comic nature) about sexual role reversals.

These role reversals were produced both thematically (for example, the speaker brags about her sexual talents or disposes of a man as soon as she grows sexually bored with him) and in terms of aesthetic performance. As to the latter, gender reversal did not only appear in relation to sexual themes. Davis states that the multiple blues about the female speaker seeking economic independence were deeply feminist in the subversion and inversion of not only the way by which men and women were expected to make a living, but also in spatial terms: a woman with economic independence was a woman who had ventured into, and colonized, the public sphere. Regarding the latter method, by which role reversal is produced through the blues pattern, Harrison claims, for instance, that "in a public arena the blues woman would receive an affirmative response from her audience because she had demonstrated that she was as bad as a man in mistreating a lover" (2000: 102). At both levels, the assumption undertaken is that the blues woman implodes sexual binarisms through an affirmative act of appropriation. While this is sociologically more realistic, Walker, through womanism, appears to suggest that it is not necessarily a matter of colonizing, but of naturally being oneself. In other words, it is not about there being a role reversal (although, because of the heavy male-centered shape of history, this may be the apparent effect) but about liberating concepts from the chains of signifier / signified, and consequently, freeing them from an up-down hierarchical system. In this way, the individual, although inspired by previous womanist legacies, adopts and accepts concepts, occupations, speech patterns, etc. in accordance to her own spirit, not because of what they represent. Celie does not choose to become a lesbian; she merely is. Neither does Shug choose to be bisexual (or more womanistically adequately, to love women sexually and sometimes men); she talks and behaves the way she does because that is her true self, not because she seeks to become more masculine. Shug is aware that by freeing her voice she becomes empowered; but this power does not rest in the fact that it is a masculine one, but on the fact that it is her own, that she is the possessor, the subject.

The emphasis that Shug (and Walker) place on the female biology and on lesbianism reassert such a separation between the sexes, and it is here where Walker is able to link womanism with the Cultural Feminism of the end of the 1970s. In contrast to Radical Feminism (1967-1975), Cultural Feminism confronted sexual discrimination by promoting and celebrating womanhood through the proclamation of a feminine counterculture. Echols describes this fundamental antagonism by establishing the

movements' opposing aims: "we find radical feminists mobilizing women on the basis of their similarity to men and cultural feminists organizing women around the principle of female difference" (2003: 6). Cultural Feminists embraced the biological uniqueness of women, from the beauty of the body to the possibility of motherhood. Cultural feminists' quest was closer to a spiritual and pseudo-religious pursuit than that of Radical Feminists; it simply avoided the class struggle, perceived as a male-centered battle, because it was believed to be inconsequential to women. The more effective solution was to create a space for women where universal sisterhood would reign. In contrast with radical feminism, the tensions created by racial difference and lesbian preferences would ideally evaporate, favoring an all-embracive system of matriarchal lineage. Ecofeminist critique owes much to the biologically-grounded arguments initiated by Jane Alpert and Kathleen Barry, who discursively recuperated the mythology of goddesses and the natural qualities and essences of women in order to promote a female counterculture:

> We must look to our matriarchal past for guidance in defining a culture that is a logical extension of nature. With the essence of motherhood and a sense of the preservation of life imprinted in our genes, matrilineal descent will naturally become the organization of the society we envision. (Barry 1973: 24)

Through the blues discourse and the play with antinomies, the matriarchal past that Walker proposes is one where black women emerge as nurturers of each other and caretakers of those willing to respect and cherish women spiritually and physically. The alternative to a capitalist, patriarchal nucleus is one based on sisterhood, a form of relating that has been carefully weaved and sewn and is symbolized through the multiple quilts and clothing crafted throughout the novel. To heal Celie's pain at finding that Mr. _____ has been hiding Nettie's letters from her, Shug tells her that they shall sew every day. "A needle and not a razor in my hand" (147), Celie thinks. Again Shug has shown her that pain can be managed constructively, and seeks to suppress Celie's visceral instinct to kill. In order to avoid any form of patriarchy, one must never attempt to overpower the other, much less by force. Within sisterhood, each member is colorfully distinct, like each of the patches, but they are bound together by a thread that makes them a single unit, a sort of family. This thread is built through the discourse of the women, through which they have shared the tragedies and joys of their experiences,

and through which they have constructively revoked supremacist dichotomies of cosmogonies. In this sense, Walker again links the blues to contemporary feminism. The agency conjured in the blues is one that is also shaped by the call-response pattern of the bars. The themes of domestic violence, psychological abuse, abandonment, depression, masochism, etc. that are so prevalent in the discourse and upon which the blues women either signify or control through *nommo* additionally procure an aesthetic platform from which to break the silence of the private sphere. If true womanhood had once implied keeping one's private space private, that is, creating a space where the absence of discourse fortified its strength as a female domain, Walker embraces the contemporary feminist notion that „the personal is political.' In several instances, Shug incites Celie to tell her about her abuse, either at the hands of Alphonso or at the hands of Mr. _____. In return, Shug tells her about her pain for not being loved by her mother, nor enough by Mr. _____ to marry her. Her sexual drive has condemned her in the eyes of African American society, but it has liberated her at the same time. Their sharing of their experiences is not only therapeutic for Celie, but it presents a form of consciousness-raising: by understanding, identifying with, and interiorizing each other's experiences, they are exposing the male-centered, socioeconomic structures of the domestic sphere. The sexual antagonism contained within the private space is a construct obeying to oppressing principles of patriarchy worldwide (through Nettie's letters, Africa also emerges as a de-mystified land where women are subdued). The conversations between Shug and Celie mirror what Davis would subsequently regard as the most subversive strategy towards the development of a feminist consciousness through the classical blues:

> The historical omnipresent secrecy and silence regarding male violence is linked to its social construction as a private problem sequestered behind impermeable domestic walls, rather than a social problem deserving political attention. . . . [The blues] names domestic violence in the collective context . . . and therefore defines it as a problem of public discourse. (1998: 28)

The slogan of „the personal is political,' which is usually attributed in origin to Radical Feminist Carol Hanisch, is a way of life for Shug. Her everyday praxis attests to her belief that by sharing each other through language and through the body, a small community of sisters can flower.

***

This chapter has aimed to show Walker's unique construction of blues women as black feminist (womanist) archetypes through signifying. We have seen that beyond Walker's signifying on Hurston and female writers of the Eurocentric tradition, her mission was also one of negotiating with male writers the image of the blues woman as a symbol. This is her repetition with reversal characteristic of signifying: beyond the race woman, she seems to suggest, stands above all a womanist. Moreover, she has uses the sexual politics of women's blues as an instrument through which to establish a historic continuum: from West African mythologies and their conception of natural binarisms, through the 1920s classical blues and their subversion of Northern black women's club movements' cult of womanhood, all the way up to 1960s and 1970s feminism. This endeavor is deeply mythopoeic in that it crafts a unique history for black women with an ancient beginning (the creation myth) in a lost, faraway land. The 1920s blues women appear as natural outcomes of these mythologies, the ultimate embodiment of the essences of antinomies before the alienation of patriarchy. At the same time, they incarnate the „mothers' of post-Civil Rights Movement Feminism, indicating a progress within the cycle. The womanist, African diaspora of *The Color Purple*, in much the same way as Eliot's mythical method, weaves creation and deliverance in its quest to connect antiquity and contemporaneity. In the same way that Shug teaches Celie that God is everything and that everything is connected, this time-defying mythical frame connects past, present and future in an effort to rewrite history, to bestow upon the much-silenced black woman the power of the Word.

3.4. LOUIS ARMSTRONG AND THE POLITICS OF SIGNIFYING IN RALPH ELLISON'S *INVISIBLE MAN*

Like *The Color Purple*, Ellison's celebrated first and only completed novel, *Invisible Man* (1952), presents a unique vision as to the signifying possibilities implicit in the text. In contrast to the feminist preoccupation maneuvering Walker's novel, *Invisible Man* gravitates towards the problem of race relations from the point of artistic individuation. Because of the controversy that Ellison as a writer and representative of African American culture generated, for more than five decades the novel has continued to raise polemical issues inherent to the interests of an ethnicity within white-dominated America. In this chapter I consider just how Ellison's singular perceptions of blackness in America are aesthetically manipulated to create Louis Armstrong's signifying cryptograph in the novel's Prologue and Epilogue.

Much has been said of Ellison's Armstrong by a multitude of scholars – most notably, Horace A. Porter (2001), Robert G. O'Meally (2004), and Paul Allen Anderson (2005) have been instrumental in centering the symbolic dimensions of the character within the context of New Jazz Studies. This chapter picks up on the most recent criticism to address the signifying possibilities with which Ellison graced Armstrong. Contrary to other analyses, however, I aim to go beyond Ellison's signifying upon other African American writers to illustrate the manner by which he intended to befit jazz as a structural and temperamental medium for Western mythopoeia. That Ellison was a firm defender of Eurocentric literature is well-known, as is the fact that such a stance caused him in great part his reputation as an African American spokesman, especially during the Civil Rights and Black Power eras. During this time, it was his public persona which made readers approach *Invisible Man* with a sceptical attitude and a critical eye as to its actual militancy. My objective is to remain as true as possible to Ellison's personal position regarding literature, Western myth and ritual as expressed in his numerous essays collected in *Shadow and Act* (1964) and *Going to the Territory* (1986), so as to provide additional insight to the complexities regarding Signifyin(g) Theory and race relations, and also to address the element of protest webbed within such an approach.

But not only had Ellison to cope with allegations against his actual commitment to the black community. He as well often found himself in the position of having to

justify his aesthetic choices before white critics. Indeed, the dense symbolism inherent to *Invisible Man* and its complex mythopoeic dynamics within which it operates are evidence of the straining relationship between black and white letters in post-World War II America. Among other things, the novel rebelled against the profound influence of sociologically-oriented studies on African American culture. Beginning with *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (1944) by Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal, the trend would continue with studies such as Abram Kardiner's and Lionel Ovesey's *The Mark of Oppression* (1951) and Stanley Elkin's *Slavery* (1959). According to Lawrence Jackson, such works promulgated "the idea that black culture was inferior and promoted self-defeat" (2005: 15).

Studies on Negro „pathology' culminated with the (in)famous *Moynihan Report* (1965), which claimed that the devastating results of emancipation had led to a matriarchal system that oppressed black masculinity. According to the report, since the black male was the one who, because of his participation in the public life, was more susceptible to humiliation and violence, the inevitable consequence was the loss of a leading father figure. Black males, according to the report, were more easily animalized, and therefore their social functions as leading members of the family were violently shattered and subdued. The result was what Daniel Moynihan, like Myrdal, described as a "pathology" inside the family structure: "In essence, the Negro community has been forced into a matriarchal structure which, because it is out of line with the rest of the American society, seriously retards the progress of the group as a whole, and imposes a crushing order on the Negro male and, in consequence, on a great many Negro women as well" (Moynihan 1965). The *Moynihan Report* articulated a racist offense that had been sustained since the era of Reconstruction. The negative mythical notion of matriarchy as a characteristic structure in African American culture has had devastating effects both in the community and in artistic expression, and doubtless was greatly responsible for the hyper-masculine and hyper-heterosexual image promoted by the Black Power Movement if the 1970s.

Throughout this item, I attempt to show how Ellison uses Armstrong as a literary tropes and motif to contravene, on the one hand, sociological studies carried out by white „authorities' on black culture, and, on the other, the type of black realism and militant fiction that developed to counteract the claims purported by such studies. By infusing Armstrong with a new poetic symbolism (one that is intimately related to the

double-voicedness of signifying as much as to the theories of Eliot, Lord Raglan, and Kenneth Burke), Ellison evades sociology and Marxism, supplying black letters with an alternative scope from which to regard the Negro artist. I begin by considering the motives and implications underlying Ellison's deviation from his contemporary black writers. By pinpointing the authorial intent, we may better understand the signifying and mythopoeic dynamics that the writer attempts to convey through the Armstrong of the novel.

3.4.1. Ellison and the African American Aesthetic Panorama

Lawrence Jackson (2000, 2005) and Ellison's biographer, Arnold Rampersad (2007), have focused on delineating the attitudinal manner by which Ellison progressively became a pariah to the Negro cause. Initially, when Ellison left his classical music studies at Tuskegee Institute and decided to settle in New York in the summer of 1936,[41] all prognostics seemed to indicate that in time he would become a valuable asset for the Communist Party. He had almost immediately befriended Langston Hughes, who soon introduced him to Louise Thompson and Richard Wright. At the time, Harlem was a hotspot for the Party's activities. As Rampersad notes, "since 1933, when the Party designated Harlem ‚a national concentration point' for Communism, radical activity had spread into a wide range of the community's institutions and activities" (2007: 92). Consequently, "the Communists reached out to

[41] In 1933, in a legendary hobo freight train ride from Oklahoma City to Alabama and in the midst of the heated tensions surrounding the Scottsboro Boys, Ellison headed to Tuskegee to pursue a career in music as a trumpet player. He was driven by his desire to develop his musicianship under the professorship of the renowned African American composer William L. Dawson, but in time his interests would shift towards the literary fields. Even though other music professors such as Hazel Lucille Harrison continued to nurture his love for music, his English professor, Morteza Drexel Sprague, and the Tuskegee head librarian, Walter Bowie Williams, instilled in him a passion for literature. His dislike for Tuskegee (although he would later portray it nostalgically), probably exacerbated by the perpetual strain to pay his fees, led him to finally abandon his studies after three years. In New York he was still uncertain of what discipline would best channel his artistic sensibility (for a period of time he took up sculpturing and shared an apartment with Richmond Barthé), but his devotion for literature would continue to grow until Ellison accepted it as his calling.

Harlem's artists and intellectuals . . . including Langston Hughes, Augusta Savage, the painter Aaron Douglas, and Paul Robeson" (Rampersad 2007: 92).

Although the exact nature of his membership is unclear, Ellison did, throughout several months, become involved in the Party's principal affairs: he became a firm supporter of the Loyalists of the Spanish Civil War, became an avid reader of Marx and André Malraux, he frequented the offices of the *Daily Worker* and, persuaded by Wright, he wrote his first review for *New Challenge.* In a complicated version of the master / protégé paradigm, the relationship between Wright and Ellison evolved from being one based on admiration to one of negation. In the early years, for Ellison, "Wright was a new sort of artist and intellectual with an enviable ideological armor – his commitment to the materialist analysis of history and culture," writes Lawrence Jackson (2000: 324). Ellison fiercely defended *Native Son* (1940), *12 Million Black Voices* (1941), and praised *Black Boy* (1945) in his well-known review, "Richard Wright's Blues" (in which, incidentally, Ellison first described the blues as a tragicomic aesthetic).

All apparent evidence pointed to the fact that Ellison had absorbed the Communist political agenda and that he was training himself as a writer of realism, in the same way as Wright. But beneath the apparent, and even before he committed himself to the writing of *Invisible Man*, Ellison had increasingly grown dissatisfied with the Movement, and more so with the literary stylistic requirements it entailed. Years later, he would have no trouble in admitting his divergence from the late 1930s and 1940s Negro cause. In 1965, he declared in an interview that:

> I never wrote the official type of fiction. I wrote what might be called propaganda having to do with the Negro struggle, but my fiction was always trying to be something else, something different from Wright's fiction. I never accepted the ideology which the *New Masses* attempted to impose on writers. They hated Dostoevsky, but I was studying Dostoevsky. They felt that Henry James was a decadent snob who had nothing to teach a writer from the lower classes, and I was studying James. I was also reading Marx, Gorki, Sholokhov, and Isaac Babel. Most of all, I was reading Malraux. (1995c: 746)

Ellison's refusal to passively abide to the filtration of influences aided him in what Lawrence Jackson (2005) has identified as his strive to invent himself. Not only was Ellison reacting against realism, but also against the sociological trend which diagnosed

African Americans as part of a pathological culture. The heavy mixture of aesthetic, political and sociological ideas weighing over a writer in search of his own voice and style made Ellison's fiction denser and more cultivated, but also more reactionary. For the writer, art was indeed social, but individuality and personal vision had to triumph above the limits of collective interest:

> Ellison ultimately rejected this form of group psychology. He thought that despite the outward appearance of unity, altruistic concern, and love, there lay hidden in the black-group identification an underlying demand for conformity, a reliance upon feudalistic-era „pre-individual' values. Ellison's artistic struggle for self-definition significantly centered upon the attainment of the „individual' values and autonomy. (L. Jackson 2005: 25)

This self-invention of the individual had to begin with the making of a choice in literary ancestry. Ellison best expressed these ideals in the well-known essay "The World and the Jug" (1963, 1964), in which he responded to Irving Howe's observations that placed Wright as the forefather of Ellison and James Baldwin. It was not only Howe's conviction that Wright's realism and naturalism were more faithful to the Negro experience that bothered Ellison; the overall sociological position was something that Ellison had resented for quite some time. "I can only ask that my fiction be judged as art; if it fails, it fails aesthetically, not because I did or did not fight some ideological battle" (Ellison 1995b: 136-137). The oft-quoted riff to the essay is Ellison's final "personal note" in which he transparently and vehemently stated his preferences:

> I respected Wright's work and I knew him, but this is not to say that he „influenced' me as significantly as you assume. Consult the text! I *sought out* Wright because I had read Eliot, Pound, Gertrude Stein, and Hemingway . . . But perhaps you will understand when I say he did not influence me if I point out that while one can do nothing about choosing one's relatives, one can, as artist, choose one's „ancestors.' Wright was, in a sense, a „relative;' Hemingway an „ancestor.' Langston Hughes, whose work I knew in grade school and whom I knew before I knew Wright, was a „relative;' Eliot . . . and Malraux and Dostoevsky and Faulkner, were „ancestors' – if you please or don't please!" (1995b: 139-140)

Ellison's lifelong perseverance in defending the plurality of technique and indeterminism of negritude would concord with what was perceived as a more conservative stance. He would become an outcast to the Civil Rights activists and

would find it difficult to accept the term „black' as a substitute for „Negro' just as much as he would have trouble in understanding early developments of the Black Power Movement and its choice to self-segregate. In the late 1960s, he was appalled when, before delivering a speech at Iowa State in Ames, "he gazed upward to see the handful of students in attendance huddling in the upper balcony, as in the days of Jim Crow when blacks had to sit in the „Crows' Nest' or „Nigger Heaven'" (Rampersad 2007: 466). He was equally alarmed by militant jazz and blues-inspired literature. His review of *Blues People* attacked Baraka for his penchant towards sociological sciences: "[Jones/Baraka] gives little attention to the blues as lyric, as a form of poetry. He appears to be attracted to the blues for what he believes they tell us of the sociology of Negro American identity and attitude" (1995b: 249) he remarked. Another one of his oft-quoted riffs still haunts critical receptions of *Blues People*: "The tremendous burden of sociology which Jones [Baraka] would place upon this body of music is enough to give even the blues the blues" (1995b: 249).

Revolutionary as *Invisible Man* was for its form and style as much as for its message, Ellison's personal and aesthetic beliefs, which would be condemned publicly by a significant sector of political activists, inevitably preclude, in our case, an analytical approach to the novel based solely on African American influences. Gates mostly views *Invisible Man* in its entirety as a parody of Wright's *Native Son* and *Black Boy*: "Ellison Signifies upon Wright's distinctive version of naturalism with a complex rendering of modernism; Wright's re-acting protagonist, voiceless to the last, Ellison Signifies upon with a nameless protagonist" (1989: 106). Gates's concerns, as I have stated several times, are limited to a strictly African American literary corpus. I do not suggest that Ellison's Eurocentric „ancestors' were overlooked by Gates at all, but simply, they were not his prime concern for the study. In the upcoming analysis, I aim to decipher the signifying message of the Louis Armstrong of *Invisible Man* in accordance with Ellison's rejection of naturalism and realism, his literary „ancestors,' and his unique form of protest. His status as one of the quintessential American jazz writers (his ideas on the tragicomic nature of the blues remain more vivid than ever through Wynton Marsalis, Stanley Crouch and Albert Murray) is one that he diligently earned. Biographical details pertaining to the marginalization he faced during the Civil Rights and Black Power Movement are important to understand not only the extent to which Ellison's vision of African American culture (and more specifically for our case,

jazz and the blues) was part of the wider American democratic frame, but also to allude once more to the debate about ownership. It must be made clear that Ellison does not question the fact that jazz and the blues are aesthetics created and refined by blacks; but the fact that he finds in the music formal and attitudinal references that point back to Euro American and European myth and ritual separates him from more Marxist-oriented jazz writers (such as Amiri Baraka) that launched Black Nationalist theories of the music.

In an ironic twist of fate, Louis Armstrong had to endure in the bebop and post-bebop years a similar attack against his public persona. Like Ellison in his speeches (more than once he had to face the crowds' booing and the reviling of writers), Armstrong's place in the jazz tradition became highly politicized. In the beginning of this study I mentioned the notorious battle between Moldy Figs and Modernists, when bop advocates had rather conspicuously referred to New Orleans revivalists as the right-wingers (with a fascist tinge) of jazz. This contestation of styles, I remind the reader, was not only based on isolated musical merits, but on the way the musician presented himself onstage. Generally, in New Orleans old school jazz, elements of minstrelsy and the vaudeville tradition were still very much a part of many shows and performances. Louis Armstrong, Louis Jordan and other players benefited from the request of white audiences of a portrayal of these elements, while bop artists persistently tried to shed away any performative or behavioral aspect that would allude to what they considered a denigrating and humiliating collective past. For the new generations, Armstrong's wide jester-like grin, his bulging eyes and his spontaneous cackles and guffaws did not only signal Uncle Tomism, but also offended black masculinity through cross-references and images. His antics on the one hand echoed the transvestite display of minstrelsy, where the white actors would ridicule black women, portraying them as low class, sexually grotesque wenches. At the same time, his trumpet alluded to the male phallus. Let us recall that horn instruments, particularly the saxophone, were generally interpreted by white elitist and intellectual circles as connotations of an oversized penis. Bebop made it a point to explore exhaustively the formal and technical possibilities of improvisation, and their attitude resembled that of a bohemian. It was the hipster stance, soon to be copied by the white Beatnick youth. Marshall Stearns describes this change brought on by the beboppers as the switch from „hot' to 'cool':

> The prevalent greeting was "Be cool, man," and each musician sank into his own deep-freeze. There was a reason in his madness: he refused to play the stereotype role of the Negro entertainer, which he rightly associated with Uncle Tomism. He then proceeded to play the most revolutionary jazz with an appearance of utter boredom, rejecting his audience entirely. Again, there was a reason. The bop stance of hunched preoccupation, of somnambulistic concentration, was based – in part – on the desire to be judged on the merits of the music alone. But the bop musician overdid it, sometimes playing with his back to the audience and walking off the stand at the end of a particular solo. (Stearns 1970: 221-222)

For Modernists, what Armstrong was conveying stood far from revolutionary ideals and the pressing need to end racism. Armstrong's infamous appearance at the Mardi Gras parade of 1949 dressed up as the King of Zulu did not help either. Wearing a grass skirt and having painted his face black, Armstrong strolled in his carriage through the parade. Subsequent pictures of the event were widely published, and a great part of his African American audience scorned and disdained his participation in what they viewed as an insulting image of the race. (Nonetheless, the few who caught on the rhetoric of the costume defended his position by stating that the King of Zulu dress was historically meant precisely to criticize the absurdity of racism in a city where black and white races had had to coexist for centuries.) Ellison was the prime agent in the pronouncement of Armstrong as a signifying figure, and certainly must have identified the controversy the musician went through as his own. But even decades after the publication of *Invisible Man* and Ellison's many essays, the double discourse inherent to Armstrong's gestures was still lost on many jazz musicians. For example, Miles Davis, who was well-known for his apparent flagrant arrogance, opined that "I loved the way Louis played the trumpet, man, but I hated the way he had to grin in order to get over with some tired white folks. Man, I just hated when I saw him doing that" (1990: 313).

3.4.2. Armstrong as a Mythopoeic Trope

Structured as a *Bildungsroman*, the Prologue and the Epilogue of *Invisible Man* enclose the nameless narrator's recollection of his past experiences, which he writes down in black and white. As a young man educated in the South, he recalls the rituals of humiliation he was forced into by whites. His blind belief in self-improvement in the all-black college (inspired by Tuskegee) is hampered by an unfortunate incident

involving Mr. Norton, one of the college's white trustees, and Trueblood, a poor black man known to have impregnated his own daughter. The school president, Bledsoe, expels the narrator for putting at stake the college's funds, and persuading him to go to New York, hands him a series of letters of recommendation. Once in New York and having distributed the letters, which had been sealed in envelopes, the narrator discovers that Bledsoe's intention had not been to aid him in finding a job, but to keep him running. Greatly dismayed, the narrator finds a job at a paint factory, but soon enough he is attacked by a paranoid worker who believes him to be after his job. The narrator is hospitalized and given shock treatments. Some time after his hospitalization, he one day improvises a passionate speech in the middle of the street calling for action against an eviction. Impressed by his eloquence, a member of an organization called the Brotherhood convinces him to join them. The narrator soon becomes a powerful Harlem orator, but as his popularity grows, so does the tension with other members of the Brotherhood. After a number of expressionist and surrealist episodes and incidents, which result in the narrator's acceptance of his Rinehart disguise, a man he is repeatedly mistaken for, the Invisible Man's story ends with the final Harlem riot scene. These riots represent the explosion of chaos and anarchy; as the whole city section bursts into violence, the narrator is hunted by Ras the Exhorter, a radical member of the Brotherhood, mounted on a horse and armed with a spear. After injuring and escaping Ras, the narrator is again attacked and chased into a nineteenth-century coal storage basement, where he secludes himself.

It is from this basement in a Harlem belting area that the narrator writes his story. In the Prologue he explains that he has been draining energy from Monopolated Light & Power through 1,396 lights to illuminate his basement. "Don't jump to the conclusion that because I call my home a „hole' it is damp and cold like a grave," he says, "there are cold holes and warm holes. Mine is a warm hole" (Ellison 1995a: 6).[42] The narrator explains his present situation as a state of hibernation whereupon the subject prepares for action, and it is an atmosphere suspended by the visual and aural senses. "I am an invisible man" (1), are the opening words of the novel; "I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. . . . When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination – indeed, everything and anything except me" (1). Illumination is used not only to provide heat,

[42] Hereafter all citations from *Invisible Man* will be indicated solely through page number.

but more importantly, to resist formlessness: "Without light I am not only invisible, but formless as well; and to be unaware of one's form is to live a death" (7).[43] The emphasis on electricity and illumination render a space visually characterized not so much by color as by shades. The contrast between lightness and darkness, silhouettes and contours and the volume of shape, is set against the opaqueness of colors evoked acoustically through Louis Armstrong. To audibly enliven his hole, the Invisible Man has with him a radio-phonograph, but plans to have five. For the first time Armstrong is introduced:

> There is a certain acoustic deadness in my hole, and when I have music I want to *feel* its vibration, not only with my ear but with my whole body. I'd like to hear five recordings of Louis Armstrong playing and singing "What Did I Do to Be so Black and Blue" – all at the same time. Sometimes now I listen to Louis while I have my favourite dessert of vanilla ice cream and sloe gin. I pour the red liquid over the white mound, watching it glisten and the vapour rising as Louis bends that military instrument into a beam of lyrical sound. Perhaps I like Louis Armstrong because he's made poetry out of being invisible. I think it must be because he's unaware that he *is* invisible. And my own grasp of invisibility aids me to understand his music. (8)

The colors black and blue conjured in the song suggest not only negritude of skin and a depressed state of mind (blue), but doubly indicate a spiritual and bodily bruising. At the same time, blue is juxtaposed to the white and red of the ice cream and the gin; the colors of the American flag. Adjacent to democracy is the significant characterization of the trumpet as a military instrument, one that calls for action. Within the density of the multiple colors, shades and ideas concentrated within the hole, Armstrong emerges as a sort of symbol that the Invisible Man must decipher through his narration. He knows that Armstrong is invisible, but he errs in assuming that Armstrong's invisibility is of an identical nature as his own. The Invisible Man's quest is one through which to understand just how the musician's invisibility is different from his own. In order to reach that comprehension, he must become familiarized with the implications of double discourse.

---

[43] John S. Wright argues that electricity and technology are a constant motif used by Ellison to contain the circular movement of the novel as much as to signify upon classic works such as H.G. Wells's *The Invisible Man* or Hemingway's "A Clean, Well-Lighted Space."

What kind of signifying agent is the Ellisonian Armstrong? How does Armstrong's signifying relate to myth? Let us start with the first question. According to Robert G. O'Meally, Ellison uses Armstrong as an existential symbol through which to transcend experience: "[Armstrong suggests] that American-style comedy offers modes of self-reflection, ways of seeing ourselves and others without taking ourselves too seriously" (2004: 282). In this sense, Armstrong emerges as a national symbol not so much with a therapeutic objective as a historical one. Armstrong's music and buffoonish licence become a medium for self-observation and self-reflection. In the same way that signifying draws attention to the signifier and is creatively nourished through its refinement and reinvention, so does Armstrong, through his minstrel-like antics, point to American morality and racial history. For Ellison, the Negro stands as a powerful symbol within American culture: they have a historic and material experience that whites do not. Because Euro Americans do not know what to make of it, and how to deal with their own historic consciousness, they employ certain stereotypes in the arts which condition reality. According to Ellison, generally, "Negroes of fiction are counterfeits. They are projected aspects of an internal symbolic process through which, like a primitive tribesman dancing himself into the group frenzy necessary for battle, the white American prepares himself emotionally to perform a social role" (1995b: 27-28). Although Ellison makes no mention of Barthes and mystification as a metalanguage, he is sharply aware of the power hierarchies constructed through the primitivist myth. But if primitive stereotypes represent the chaos within the democratic chaosmos, then how can Armstrong elude accusations of racist perpetuation? The solution lies in the fact that, according to Ellison, Armstrong is not sterilely reproducing a traditional image; he is parodying it by drawing attention to the signifier. "Mistaken as a clown or fool," O'Meally explains, "Armstrong himself is an invisible man and thus ironically freer to experiment with his art, freer from the pressures that typically go with the official recognition of ‚high art'" (2004: 283).

As we have seen through the theoretical background in Signifyin(g) Theory, in African American culture, laughter has evolved as a psychosocial medium to the point of having been ritualized in oratory forms. Lawrence Levine believes that the comic features of the slave and emancipation eras have determined all subsequent forms of black expression, from the moment that there arose "the desire to place the situation in which we [African Americans] find ourselves into perspective; to exert some degree of

control over our environment" (1978: 300). Like Gates and Levine, Ellison digs within the vernacular to find the meaning of the black American humor that is fostered by the blues idiom, and it is precisely at this point where he takes his departure from realism and from his contemporary black writers. The tragicomic facet of the blues is not one that Ellison builds on the foundations of his literary „relatives,' but on the mythography of his „ancestors,' particularly Joyce, Eliot, and Kenneth Burke. In "Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke," a response essay to Stanley Edgar Hyman, Ellison exposes his scepticism towards ethnologically-oriented forms of literary criticism. This bears an explanation: Ellison himself an enthusiast of folklore and the vernacular, he nonetheless perceives that there is a danger in critics' tendencies in claiming Africa to be the genesis of black American verbal and ritual expression. Specifically, Ellison distrusts the „trickster' archetype that apparently, Hyman was so enthralled by. Although the following passage does not refer concretely to the Armstrong character, it is illustrative to make the point that Ellison draws his inspiration from sources that (and here we take our leave from the Esu myths) have geographically developed somewhere else:

> Although the figure in blackface looks suspiciously homegrown, Western and Calvinist to me, Hyman identifies it as being related to an archetypical trickster figure originating in Africa. Without arguing the point I shall say only that if it *is* a trickster, its adjustment to the contours of „white' symbolic needs is far more intriguing than its alleged origins, for it tells us something of the operation of American values as modulated by folklore and literature. (Ellison 1995b: 52)

With this in mind, let us attend to two descriptions Ellison makes of Armstrong. The first belongs to the same essay and is a follow-up to the previous argument:

> Armstrong's clownish license and intoxicating powers are almost Elizabethan; he takes liberties with kings, queens and presidents; emphasizes the physicality of his music with sweat, spittle and facial contortions; he performs the magical feat of making romantic melody issue from a throat of gravel; and some few years ago was recommending to all and sundry his personal physic, „Pluto Water,' as a purging way to health, happiness and international peace. (Ellison 1995b: 52)

The second description belongs to a personal letter written to Albert Murray on account of Hyman's short-sightedness. Drawing again on the motif of Elizabethan fools, Ellison suggests that Armstrong's rhetoric transcends primitive, cannibal-like,

instinctive creature of *The Tempest*: "Shakespeare invented Caliban, or changed himself into him – Who the hell dreamed up Louie? Some of the bop boys consider him Caliban but if he is he's a mask for a lyric poet who is much greater than most now writing" (2002b: 243). It is here where signifying, as a rhetorical device, and Western literature merge: Armstrong stresses his own visual signifier (his overt and hyperbolic corporeality; that is, his mask) whilst mythopoiecally reproducing an archetype and paradigmatic modes that are not African, but part of the aesthetic tradition of the Western canon (the signified). Clearly, Ellison had no interest in tracing a heritage to African myths, and despite the fact that he did study African American folklore, it was an influence which paled in comparison to the great Western epics: "I knew the trickster Ulysses just as early as I knew the wily rabbit of Negro American lore," he wrote, "and I could easily imagine myself a pint-sized Ulysses but hardly a rabbit, no matter how human and resourceful a Negro" (1995b: 58). In other words, the vernacular aspect exemplified through Armstrong is the signifier itself, the mask of minstrelsy that developed in accordance with a unique historic experience in the United States. Only the Negro can incarnate such an attitude towards history.

It is significant that the Invisible Man refers to the trumpet as a military device. Armstrong's instrument is not only military because of the original function of the trumpet, but because it is part of his strategy in wearing the mask; it is a weapon through which he is able to reduce the chaos of negritude into form. His invisibility is successfully processed through ritual, while the narrator's is stuck in a state of hibernation. Armstrong confronts the world; the narrator processes it through meditation and paranoid impulses. Armstrong's ritual implies transcendence not because order is bestowed upon the outer chaosmos, but because the subject overcomes and triumphs over the destructive, chthonic forces operating within his own experience. The world goes on unchanged, but the subject now has a strategy with which to affront it, and this strategy is shaped in the form of art. The blues, according to Ellison, "at once express both the agony and the possibility of conquering it through sheer toughness of spirit. They fall short of tragedy only in that they provide no solution, offer no scapegoat but the self" (1995b: 94). In this reverse dynamic of the ritual where the individual rises over the collectivity, Armstrong, as the scapegoat, expiates his personal chaos as a an African American; he represents the American hero in much the same way that Hemingway's bullfighters faced the chaos of the bull, or that Huckleberry Finn chose

hell over guilt. It is a sacrifice that involves a rebirth into another, superior mode of being; it is every American hero's quest for transcendence. The Invisible Man must follow the same paradigm and the same rituals to pass into Armstrong's superior state of being. As James B. Lane says, "the invisible man became in many respects Everyman" (64), epitomizing the metaphysical preoccupations of the contemporary (black) American.

The song that Ellison chose to create the scenario of the Prologue is as well symptomatic of the American hero's forbearance in the face of chaos. "Black and Blue" was written by Andy Razaf and Fats Waller for the 1929 Broadway revue, *Hot Chocolates*. According to O'Meally, the song was written at the request of the gangster Arthur Flegenheimer (also known as Dutch Schultz). "„Black and Blue' offered just what Dutch had in mind," says O'Meally, "a conventional piece of staged racial pathos" (2004: 286). Alfred Appel, Jr. notices that in Armstrong's recording, a verse is missing. In her recording, Edith Wilson sings an extra verse: "Brown and yellows / All have fellows / Gentlemen prefer them light." According to Appel, "Armstrong's „editing' buried this verse forever in order to highlight the protest – subversive editing, considering that the record, on OKeh's „race' label, was aimed at blacks" (2004: 140). Indeed, it is this version of the song that Ellison portrays in his novel, and while this may mainly be due to his unquestionable admiration towards Armstrong, Ellison would probably as well not have been content with a set of lyrics that would have shared the racial theme with issues of sex or gender, which he deemed as inconsequential. His aim was existential: this is the epicenter of the Invisible Man's story, the protest for the acknowledgement of humanity.[44]

[44] The full set of lyrics does not appear in the novel; it is only the chorus line "What did I do, to be so black and blue?" that is tellingly quoted by Ellison. In any case, a view of the full lyrics may aid a more profound understanding of the tragicomic aspect of Armstrong's recording, if only through lyrical content (the reader is advised to listen to the song as well, so as to better appreciate the signifying game between lyrical content, musical arrangements and Armstrong's vocal pathos):

> Cold empty bed springs hurt my head
> Feels like old Ned, wished I was dead
> What did I do to be so black and blue?
>
> Even the mouse ran from my house
> They laugh at you and all that you do
> What did I do to be so black and blue?

The song is consistent with the Prologue's emphasis on colors and shades, and it is through the dream sequence that it instigates that we can begin to comprehend the relationship that signifying bears with Eurocentric mythopoeia. In the Prologue, the narrator recounts the hallucination he had while listening to "Black and Blue" under the effects of substance abuse:

> So under the spell of the reefer I discovered a new analytical way of listening to music. The unheard sounds came through, and each melodic line existed of itself, stood out clearly from all the rest, said its piece, and waited patiently for the other voices to speak. That night I found myself hearing not only in time, but in space as well. I not only entered the music but descended it, like Dante, into its depths. (8-9)

Ellison's mergence of the chronological and the spatial shifts the hero's promethean quest into another dimension. The dream sequence, pacing through the windmills of the subconscious, reproduces a series of motifs prototypical of African American culture and history. "Black and Blue" has opened the gateway to the formless world of beneath. The outer impressions of Armstrong's piece are substituted by the Invisible Man's expression of the essence of the song and intertwined with symbols cornered in the deepest layers of his subconscious. Once the blues idiom has played its role as instigator, the song gradually fades away, leaving the character locked in a profundity where the laws of spatial and temporal rationale are no longer applicable.

In this hallucinatory descent the character is thrashed by the different tempos. He enters a cave where he sees "an old woman singing a spiritual as full of Weltschmerz as flamenco" (9). As he penetrates downwards, the tempo now speeds up, and the Invisible Man finds himself before a conglomeration of voices in what appears to be a ceremonious preaching. Visibility is now lost: throughout the service there is no allusion to space or to the bodily form of the speakers. The reader senses only what the narrator hears. Still, the evocation of colors becomes the leit-motif of the preacher's

---

I'm white inside but, that don't help my case
That's life can't hide what is in my face

How would it end ain't got a friend
My only sin is in my skin
What did I do to be so black and blue?

How would it end I ain't got a friend
My only sin is in my skin
What did I do to be so black and blue? (Armstrong 2004)

sermon, "Blackness of Blackness." In the traditional blues idiomatic form of call and response, the incongruent affectations of blackness are articulated: "In the beginning . . . there was blackness," yet "the sun . . . was bloody red"; "black is bloody" yet "black ain't . . . red"; "black will make you" and "black will un-make you" (9-10). The Invisible Man, thrown inside the vortex of these colors, tempos and timbres, is flogged around by the brutal sounds and rhythms; he is but a puppet battered by the vehement, amorphous assembly.

He is then banished from the congregation by a voice with a "trombone timbre" (10). "Git out of here, you fool! Is you ready to commit treason?" (10), it screams at him. The holler alludes to the Invisible Man's own discourse as an orator. As an active member of the Brotherhood, all procedures and steps must be done in the name of the race. The crowd is only deemed as instrumental, as a way to materialize benefits for the whole community. When the Invisible Man is convicted by the Brotherhood committee for his dubious stance between individual and collective action, Brother Jack straightforwardly articulates the paradox of leadership: "Our job is not to *ask* them what they think but to *tell* them" (473). The Invisible Man realizes that all along the politics of his speech were thus never meant to aid or soothe a single person's anguish, or his own, for that matter, but only to strengthen the community as an absorbing, opaque identity. To act according to the individual's needs leads to acknowledging the crowd's inner division and therefore to open fissures in the potential of the multitude as an instrument of power. The trombone-like voice has a name for people who are biased by individualist visions: traitors. And yet, because the voice emerges from the depths of the subconscious, we realize that he is somewhat guilty of thinking of himself as such. Furthermore, the timbre of the hallucinated voice is reminiscent of the jazz instrument that allows different onomatopoeic effects. Ellison was a great admirer of Joe „Tricky Sam' Nanton, a member of the Duke Ellington band. According to Horace A. Porter, "„Tricky Sam' Nanton is known for perfecting the growl style of trombone playing, the use of a plunger-style mute to duplicate and mock the sounds of the human voice" (2001: 36). The voice that throws the Invisible Man out of the sermon resembles an attacking growl, a distinct scream inside the anarchy of shouts.[45]

[45] The trombone has a subtle yet recurring presence in Ellison's fiction. In his second and unfinished novel, *Juneteenth*, one of the leading characters, Reverend Hickman, is described as sounding like "God's trombone" (1999: 3).

The Invisible Man then turns to the singer of spirituals, where the tempo takes a slower pace. In a blues-like style of moans and groans, she tells the narrator her tragic story. She both loves and hates her master, the father of her children, who it is implied has raped her, and she moans painfully and laughs at the same time. She yearns for freedom and yet she does not know what freedom is. "I guess now it ain't nothing but knowing how to say what I got up in my head" (11), she concludes. The Invisible Man is confused; he cannot make sense out of anything she says. Finally, a remark on what he sees is given: "She sat with her face in her hands, moaning softly; her leather-brown face was filled with sadness" (11). An indication of a menacing laughter "upstairs" (10) is the only spatial incentive given. The woman's facial close-up of a textured sadness is thus blended with the notion of laughter. In this scene, the tragicomic dimension of the blues is distorted. The laughter the Invisible Man hears is anything but comic; he is afraid of it and cannot shut his senses from it. His mind is reflecting the aspects that make up the blues, for Armstrong is singing somewhere beyond that dream. However, he is unable to actually place them together because in the end, he does not know how to deal with ambivalence. Thus the laughter becomes grotesque and disturbing, and the old woman pleads for him to leave. One of the old woman's sons appears "out of nowhere" (11) and attempts to strangle him. The Invisible Man runs through the darkness, stalked by the heavy sounds of a human hunt: "The trumpet was blaring and the rhythm was too hectic. A tom-tom beating like heart-thuds began drowning the trumpet, filling my ears" (12). Unable to stop because of the rhythmic footsteps behind him, he tries to cross a road, only to be struck by a "speeding machine" that "scrapes the skin" (12) off his leg. These are the final images of the hallucination, through which we return to the chromatic intensity of red (the wound) and black. The protagonist slips back to Louis Armstrong's voice rasping on the words "What did I do, to be so black and blue?"

The subconscious space evoked by the dream, as we have seen, turns from the conjuring of pure colors to slight locative indications of verticality, until the final crossroads scenario. These referents are intermingled with the tempo, the movement or the freezing of time. The blending of the visual and the aural is a phenomenon that the narrator is self-conscious of; his obsession to fully illuminate his hole and play five recordings of "Black and Blue" so as to delineate his own form points to his self-awareness of the two senses. But as they appear in the dream, through more or less

delineated and illuminated images and through the different tempos, they provide a contextual meaning to the fragments of the universal hero's quest. Referring to this scene, Paul Allen Anderson suggests that the Prologue signifies upon black modernist texts such as Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* and Jean Toomer's *Cane*:

> The Dantean journey into the subconscious . . . builds on familiar tropes within African American literary modernism. Numerous novels and short stories associated with the interwar Harlem Renaissance, for example, included scenes where black protagonists experience acute psychic distress and destabilization during episodes of musical listening. (2005: 91)

While such an exegesis of the Prologue is certainly noteworthy, I would argue that Ellison was more intent on signifying upon the mythographic theories of Eliot and Lord Raglan.

Ellison discovered *The Wasteland* during his years as a music student at Tuskegee and immediately appreciated a connection between the poem's themes and structures and jazz antiphonies. Later in his life he wrote that

> Somehow its rhythms were often closer to jazz than were those of the Negro poets, and even though I could not understand then, its range of allusions was as mixed and as varied as that of Louis Armstrong. Yet there were its discontinuities, its changes of pace and its hidden system of organization which escaped me. (Ellison 1995b: 160)

On Ellison's obsession over Eliot's poem, Rampersad writes that "the link between *The Wasteland* and jazz improvisation is obvious. Both were responses to the deforming cultural pressures during and after the disaster that was World War I" (77). The poem represented modernist complexities and expressed itself through the polyphony of voices stripped of bodily entity (similar to the voicing technique that Ellison employs for the sermon of the hallucinated underworld). *The Wasteland*'s heavy sense of historical consciousness made Ellison contemplate the black individual's choice to be either 'inside' or „outside' the chaos of history as a necessary step. In the same way that Eliot had retrieved from Frazer's *The Golden Bough* its sense of a unifying hierarchy, completion and order, so did Ellison borrow from Eliot the mythical method. It is no wonder that author and narrator insist so much on the notion of spatially listening to music. At a certain point before the dream sequence, the Invisible Man states that:

> Invisibility, let me explain, gives one a slightly different sense of time, you're never quite on the beat. Sometimes you're ahead and sometimes behind. Instead of the swift and imperceptible flowing of time, you are aware of its nodes, those points where time stands still or from which it leaps ahead. That's what you hear vaguely in Louis' music. (8)

Those nodes acquire a cosmogonic meaning through the dream. As the Invisible Man drifts into Armstrong's breaks, he comes across an arrangement of universal motifs and archetypes. These fragments of the hero's quest are buried deep within the subconscious; they have yet to be ordered, to turn from chaosmos to cosmos. Mythical binarisms acquire a full presence: the congregation and the sermon point to the tension between the hero's individuality and the interests of society (a tension with which the Invisible Man has dealt through his activity with the Brotherhood and which signifies on the essential structures within which ritual functions); and the sons' thirst to slay the father and do right by their mother (who has taken the upper hand in killing the father) reflects the binarism clustering two generations, the gods and the titans. These motifs are imperishable, and although they appear disguised within African American specific signifiers, they have ecumenical significance and applicability.

Another interesting pairing is that of the wailing mother's singing of a spiritual as full of Weltschmerz as flamenco. The term „Weltschmerz' was coined by Jean-Paul Sartre to refer to the psychological suffering and anguish at the realization of the physical world's limits to satisfying and fulfilling the subject. It represents, therefore, the tragedy of human existence. But significantly, the tragic mode is juxtaposed to flamenco, a music which Ellison identified as the Spanish version of the blues temperament. In his essay "Flamenco" (1954), the writer recalls attending a performance by Vicente Escudero and Pepe de la Matrona (mistakenly named by Ellison as "Pepe el del Matrona") in Paris. For him, flamenco, as much as the blues, has been the object of primitivist stereotyping and racist misreading. Gypsies are as much an outcast as were the American slaves (1995c: 24), and both groups have enriched the Western tradition while questioning its very values. By relating the cause and evolution of both arts – from their affirmative stance towards life to the performative dimensions, for both flamenco and the blues constitute a "communal art" (1995c: 23) where the active participation of musicians and the audience is an intrinsic part of the ritual – Ellison once more appeals to the universality of his main point of focus, the blues idiom. Like the blues, the flamenco rituals are deeply democratic; the tragicomic

existential stance resulting from belonging to an „oppressed' people is shared by all individuals who are familiar with the idiom at hand, from its structure to its onomatopoeic effects:

> Flamenco, while traditional in theme and choreography, allows a maximum of individual expression, and a democratic rivalry such as is typical of a jam session; for, like the blues and jazz, it is an art of improvisation, and like them it can be very graphic . . . Great spaces, echoes, rolling slopes, the charging of bulls, and the prancing and galloping of horses flow in this sound much as animal cries, train whistles, and the loneliness of the night sound through the blues. (Ellison 1995c: 24)

This subsistence of the heroic endeavor represents the comic mode, the will to be nimble and subsist. Through the old woman's cryptographic song of tragedy and comedy, the mixture between spirituals and flamenco, the Invisible Man comes in contact with the essential binarism of the blues, the tragic / comic. It is the assimilation, the comprehension of the fusion between the apparently irreconcilable components into the tragicomic which makes Armstrong's invisibility unique, allowing him to transcend.

Displayed without any order or hierarchy in the subconscious, all that the scenario presents is anarchy and entropy. But if the subject is to grasp the significance of the mythical method, that shaping and ordering model that fuses contemporanity and antiquity and that reveals the circular traces of history, then he will defeat futility and rise into his superior self. The prolepsis and analepsis recurrently appearing in the novel, and the narrator's haunting, pending feeling that he has already lived through certain experiences only echo his mysterious remark in the Prologue: "The end is in the beginning and lies far ahead" (6). Contemporaneity and antiquity, according to Eliot, can only become parallels through the spatial arrangement of the mythical method. By deciphering the meaning of the components of the binarisms and the manner by which mythemes relate to one another, the Invisible Man can potentially acquire the type of signifying invisibility of which Armstrong is the master.

According to his biographer, in the early 1940s, as Ellison was breaking away from Marxism, he immersed himself in reading about myth and symbol. Aside from Eliot, he was fascinated by Frazer, the Cambridge ritualist school, Gilbert Murray's *Greek Tragedy*, Jane Harrison's *Themis*, Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*, and

by Lord Raglan's *The Hero.* In 1955, Ellison would declare in an interview that he was in fact "reading *The Hero* by Lord Raglan and speculating on the nature of Negro leadership in the United States" when he "wrote the first paragraph of *Invisible Man*" (1995b: 176). While much can be said of the influence that Raglan's theories on myth and ritual had on Ellison, particularly in the development of initiation rites, I would like to emphasize Raglan's observations of the victories of "the hero of tradition" (2004: 203), as opposed to the hero-king of history, within the monomyth. A common ritual to be overcome by the hero is the magical contest: "Oedipus wins his throne by guessing a riddle; Theseus by escaping from a maze. The magical victories of the three Jewish heroes are all connected with rain-making. Joseph successfully prognosticates the weather . . ." (Raglan 2004: 203-204), and so the list goes on. "The story of the hero of tradition . . . is the story of ritual progress" (Raglan 2004: 2003).

Throughout the narrative, the Invisible Man goes through a series of trials over which he fails to succeed. His action is inhibited, and he negates his own responsibility. Such is the substance of his invisibility. As Ellison would claim, the protagonist's invisibility results from "a refusal to run the risk of his own humanity" (1995b: 179). The narrative between the Prologue and the Epilogue is the confession that makes him aware that he must confront and surpass chaos. His hibernation represents the Western hero's stage within the whale's belly, where he comes in contact with other forces. Armstrong becomes the figure of wisdom incarnate, the shaman, but he cannot deliver his message straightforwardly. Armstrong uses indirection because, as the vessel of a black aesthetic invested in signifying, he emerges as a double-voiced entity, and because, as a figure of wisdom of ecumenical powers, his message requires an effort on the part of the hero. Rather than being straightforward and adhering to a first order semiotic correspondence between signifier and signified, he sings to the Invisible Man in the form of a riddle that like Oedipus, the protagonist must order and decipher. Armstrong then takes him to the maze of his own mind, encoded in tragicomic, blues-idiomatic visual and aural images that like Theseus, the Invisible Man must „escape.' The only way to „escape' the maze is to order and assimilate it, to endow it with a structure, to create the cosmos.

Armstrong's riddle, furthermore, is delivered through signifiers, and it is here where the vernacular acquires a major presence in the text. Recalling the struggles he had in developing the folkloric elements in his writing, Ellison would claim that he

"knew that in both *The Waste Land* and *Ulysses* ancient myth and ritual were used to give form and significance to the material," but that it took him "a few years to realize that the myths and rites which we find functioning in our everyday lives could be used in the same way" (1995b: 174). Ellison was to realize that the rhetorical games of signification that he had witnessed and been a part of in the South stood as rituals bearing the same principles of transcendence as represented in Western myth. In the same way that Joyce found in Irish folklore the path to the mythical method, so does Ellison use the vernacular for the development of his own mythic, jazz-oriented cosmogony. Here Ellison emphatically identifies the folklore material he uses as African American, not as African; as I have stated above, the African continent held little interest for Ellison (the only aesthetic relation he would bear to Africa was through the collection of sculptures, which had been more motivated by his interest in European avant-garde aesthetics than by any suggestion of racial heritage). Armstrong's riddle is profoundly of a signifying nature: devices of deviancy, irony, parody, metaphors and metonymies are provided as modes of (in)direction. It is significant that the final image in the hallucination is a sort of crossroads. Although Ellison rejected the Esu mythologies, this scene most likely still represents the threshold of interpretation, the surpassing of the ritual. But the Invisible Man is almost run over by a roaring machine, preventing him from crossing it.

Having written his confession, the Invisible Man of the Epilogue has come to understand the kind of victory involved in the triumph over the magical contest. In this mythopathic moment, he is now able to decipher Armstrong's riddle, and therefore is now able to make an adequate, heroic use of invisibility. And so, from the whale's belly, he returns to history, into the circuitous quest:

> Thus, having tried to give pattern to the chaos which lives within the pattern of your certainties, I must come out, I must emerge. And there's still a conflict within me. With Louis Armstrong one half of me says, "Open the window and let the foul air out," while the other says, "It was good green corn before the harvest." Of course Louis was kidding, *he* wouldn't have thrown old Bad Air out, because it would have broken up the music and the dance, when it was the good music that came from the bell of old Bad Air's horn that counted. Old Bad Air is still around with his music and his dancing and his diversity, and I'll be up and around with mine. And, a I said before, a decision has been made. I'm shaking off the old skin and I'll leave it here in the hole. I'm coming out, no less invisible without it, but coming out nevertheless. (581)

According to Susan L. Blake, Ellison's reliance on Western myth and the symbolic action inherent to ritual practice allows the Invisible Man to transcend beyond cultural identity. The finishing line of the novel, poetic and acoustic to the very last, is indicative of the preoccupation with universal myth and psychology: "Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?" (581), asks the Invisible Man. Blake professes that this line reveals the conviction that "cultural identity becomes indistinguishable from the human condition" (1986: 77), which points to "Ellison's ability to adapt . . . black folklore" (1986: 97) to Western myth and ritual. I would add that although methods of adaptation are involved, Ellison's sense of the universal and the eternal within black folklore stemmed from the vernacular itself. As he examined the culturally-specific rhetorical rituals of black language he found that they functioned in accordance to Western myth, and that they demanded to be reflected as such in artistic expression.

In the line of Kenneth Burke, Ellison believed that myth was prone to entelechy, that is, the perfection and completion of potential. Mythopoeia and mythography came as an adequate substitute to Communist theory:

> Burke led Ralph toward the embracing of a formalist literary logic, in which the science of Communism was supplanted by an emphasis on the complex meanings of every aspect of the linguistic world constituted by and within a work of literary art. Psychology became a pervasive instrument for understanding literature; symbols and mythic references constitute meanings that ideology can barely begin to plumb. (Rampersad 2007: 206)

Like Burke as well, he believed that one's "equipment for living" was not only culturally-based, but could as well be oriented towards an individual strategy.[46]

[46] An avid reader of Burke's theories, Ellison was greatly influenced by *The Philosophy of Literary Form* (1941). More than Wright or Hughes, Burke was responsible for the development of Ellison's understanding of art as a vital tool for existential preservation. In his essay "Equipment for Living," Burke alluded to the strategic qualities inherent to great art:

> For surely, the most highly alembicated and sophisticated work of art, arising in complex civilizations, could be considered as designed to organize and command the army of one's thoughts and images, and to so organize them that one 'imposes upon the enemy the time and place and conditions for fighting preferred by oneself.' One seeks to 'direct the larger movements and operations' in one's campaign of living. One 'maneuvers,' and the maneuvering is in 'art.' . . . One tries, as far as possible, to develop a strategy whereby one 'can't lose.' One tries to change the rules of the game until they fit his own necessities. . . .

"Ralph's true crusade," writes Rampersad, "was toward individualism, not group identity" (2007: 190). The American hero being primarily an individualist and a self-made man, it was imperative that ritual action should involve the personal strategy through which to overcome, or at least deal with, the given, chaotic situation. Speaking about Hemingway, for instance, Ellison declared that he "was engaged in working out a personal problem through the evocative, emotion-charged images and ritual therapy available through the manipulation of art forms" (1995b: 38). The individual was not to be fused in a homogeneous mass within the symbol of „the people,' for the risk of losing one's „form' of identity was far too great. Art was still a social tool, but it depended upon the individual to use it as a strategy. According to Burke:

> Critical and imaginative works are answers to questions posed by the situation in which they arose. They are not merely answers, they are *strategic* answers, *stylized* answers. . . . These strategies size up the situations, name their structure and outstanding ingredients, and name them in a way that contains an attitude towards them.
>
> This point of view does not, by any means, vow us to personal or historical subjectivism. The situations are real; the strategies for handling them have public content; and in so far as situations overlap from individual to individual, or from one historical period to another, the strategies possess universal relevance. (1973: 1)

Ellison's impassioned counterargument to Howe in "The World and the Jug" was greatly motivated by Howe's implying that there was a precise attitude (specifically Wright's militant realism) that all Negro literature ought to convey. Ellison defended his right to his own strategy, his own "stylized answer" by comparing Howe to the familiar Southern demagogues:

> In his effort to resuscitate Wright, Irving Howe would designate the role which Negro writers are to play more rigidly than any other Southern politician – and for the best of reasons. We must express "black" anger and "clenched militancy"; most of all we should not become too interested in the problems of art and literature, even though it is through these that we seek our individual identities. (1995b: 120)

For a long time Ellison found himself in the situation of having to justify why his writing was not more sociologically-oriented, why his militant drive was slumbering.

One tries to fight on his own terms, developing a strategy for imposing the proper 'time, place, and conditions.' (1973: 298)

Whatever critics he had (including the student groups of the Civil Rights era that resented his ideas) failed to perceive the amount of protest involved in his mythopoeic strategies. If art represented freedom, it was, in Ellison's view, insulting that critics felt the need to enforce a certain style upon the artist. Louis Armstrong, ever Ellison's greatest muse, was to be condemned for his own approach to his highly perfected discipline.

On the subject of the influence that Burke's notions of strategies and stylized answers had on Ellison, Berndt Ostendorf remarks that "long before any theories of body language were current, Ellison played with the embodiment of language on the one hand, and with the body and its signals on the other" (1986: 147). Ostendorf continues by claiming that "Ellison's understanding of the meaning of style is more anthropological rather than narrowly technical. Style refers to the handling of language as well as to the handling of the body. . . . The same could be said of Louis Armstrong's authoritative statement in „Potato-Head Blues'" (1986: 147). What is important to point out is that this language (whether verbal or visual) was propelled by Ellison in his writing precisely because of its vernacular character and because of the signifying games involved. The rhetoric webbed within that language constituted the element of protest, a protest that resisted the fragmentation of the individual (or the artist) on account of the community's needs. Armstrong's personal strategy, fictionalized by Ellison through invisibility, precisely allowed him to materialize forms of poignant criticism against the oppressor. Whether through body language (his clownish physicality) or through verbal technique, he was able to get away with a piercing satire. Today, jazz enthusiasts, for example, often recall how Armstrong, the emblematic figure of the doubleness of minstrelsy, signified upon European royalty:

> In 1932, as he was about to perform "I'll Be Glad When You're Dead You Rascal You" for the king of England, Armstrong jovially shouted from the stage, "This one's for you, Rex!" Everyone smiled at Satchmo's good-natured informality without realizing what it meant for an uptown New Orleanian to call the king of England "Rex."(Brothers 2006: 82)

Armstrong was in fact alluding to the much satirized Rex of the Mardi Gras parade, the counter-figure to the King of Zulus, which also parodied whites' perception of black culture as primitive.

Another anecdote reflecting Armstrong's command of signifying language is one collected by Alfred Appel, Jr. In the early thirties, when Armstrong reached a public beyond the target audience of race records, he maintained his double discourse in many of his recordings:

> To compensate for the more formal, mainstream and „multicultural' aspects of the new music, the Armstrong of 1930-33 engaged in a calculated and unique effort to narrow the psychic distance between himself and his home listeners, who now included white people as never before, as well as black folks who had to be kept in the fold. Phonograph records and radios represented the only way most blacks were going to enter white homes. "Now, ladies and gentlemen, we have a little novelty for you this evening," Armstrong says to his invisible audience at the outset of two records ("Chinatown, My Chinatown" in 1931 and "New Tiger Rag" in 1932). He tries to keep blacks in the fold by occasionally employing their secret vocabulary. "Get a load of this viper's language," he says in "Sweet Sue, Just You" (1933), as he and Bud Johnson are about to sing some charming nonsense. A „viper' was a marijuana smoker – Armstrong was an avid lifelong inhaler - and the delirious singing seems to document their „high.' Armstrong and his black listeners knew that few whites would understand this jive, the joke's on them, dig it, can you keep a secret? (Appel 2004: 136)

But Armstrong did not always rely on the indirection of signifying; he would also turn to a more straightforward discourse in the late 1950s (he had already, for some time, been targeted as an Uncle Tom by bop followers). America was shocked to hear Armstrong attacking President Eisenhower and Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus for their policies and stances on the Little Rock Nine. In 1957 nine black teenagers were barred from a Little Rock (Arkansas) high school, where the city still refused to accept integration in educational institutions. Robert G. O'Meally describes how, repulsed and embittered by the situation, Armstrong became „Ambassador Satch': he "denounced Eisenhower for his foot-dragging, accusing the President for being „two-faced' on civil rights and allowing „Faubus to run the governement'" (2004: 193). Krin Gabbard adds that Armstrong also stated that "that the American government could „go to hell' and that Eisenhower had „no guts'" (2004: 168). It was his lack of indirection and bluntness that endorsed the image of Armstrong as a somewhat committed „race man.' Even through his signifying technique had been built on the specifically black, the vernacular, it was political rhetoric that the black youth earnestly craved, not an aesthetic protest honoring the tradition of minstrelsy, which they associated with slavery.

***

Today, in the aftermath of the controversy that the writer generated within the black and white intelligentsia, it is the Ellisonian Armstrong which seems to have crystallized itself into the illusion of the eternal, if not completely in the jazz field, at least in the academic one. That Armstrong bears the honor of being one of the ‚great men' of jazz owes much to Ellison and his universalization of his signifying through cross-references to Shakesperian buffoons and heroic archetypes. His signifying is regarded as an excelling form of protest characteristic of a ‚race man': because of the mergence between black double-voicedness and universal heroic paradigms, Armstrong's Uncle Tom image has been almost completely obliterated. Celebrations of Armstrong the artist continue today not only through Albert Murray, Stanley Crouch and Wynton Marsalis, but also through the work of critics as disparate in their backgrounds as Gunther Schuller and Dan Morgenstern. But the connection between artist and muse should never be tainted by allegations of indebtedness; Ellison was responsible for a mythopoeic creation of Armstrong, but so was Armstrong greatly responsible, through his music and performance, for the development of the writer. As Ellison convincingly declared in an interview, his discipline was but the result of the aesthetics he had learned from great jazzmen and legendary Americans: "My strength comes from Louis Armstrong and Jimmy Rushing, Hot Lips Page and people on that level, Duke Ellington . . . [and] Mark Twain," he states, "all kind of American figures who have been influenced by and contributed to that complex interaction of background and cultures which is specifically *American*" (2002a: 286).

3.5. RITUALS OF HEROISM IN ALBERT MURRAY'S NON-FICTION AND *TRAIN WHISTLE GUITAR*

I have hinted several times throughout this dissertation the close literary and personal relationship between Ralph Ellison and Albert Murray, who met for the first time in Tuskegee in 1935. Although Murray's approach to the blues idiom greatly echoes Ellison's standpoint, his structural framework of jazz-based rituals in accordance with monomythical paradigms represents a deeper venture into literary theory that takes its departure from Ellison's penchant towards a more lyrical and poetic nature. In a way, Murray's non-fiction presents, to use his habitual terminology, an "extension, elaboration and refinement" (1995, 1996, 2000) of Ellison's essays. By way of unmotivated signifying on Ellison, Murray delves into the core of the tragicomic essence of the blues to retrieve the categorical paradigms of myth and ritual so as to launch the blues idiom as a strategy of heroism. This is not to say that Ellison did not display or put to practice his abysmal knowledge on literary theory, for, as we have seen in the previous chapter, conjuring the structures of archetypal modes, images and genres was a steady course he frequently undertook in his writing. But whereas Murray uses the blues idiom as a pretext to taxonomically survey and define the structural components of universal myth and ritual, Ellison's style generally lingers on evocative passages with a magnificent elegance that more subtly sways readers to come to terms with his point. When placed side by side, one gets the impression that Murray's writing is more prescriptive, while Ellison's is more descriptive; Murray is more focused on signified concepts, while Ellison frequently procrastinates and remains at the surface level of the signifier.

A comparative study between Murray and Ellison carries numerous possibilities. It is hard to find a scholarly piece on Murray overlooking Ellison's presence, and Murray's influence on Ellison has also proved to be instrumental in the shaping of his attitude. Some scholars, such as Jon Panish (1997), render Ellison's and Murray's views as practically the same, and approach them as a single visionary unit.[47]

[47] In the line of many other critics and scholars, Panish presents Murray and Ellison as a single, contrasting force to the mainstream tendency in jazz writing. Their unique position is summarized monolithically as follows:

Considering the fact that they both treasured the same influences (Hemingway, Malraux, Eliot, Joyce, Mann and Burke were among their favorites), and that they reached very similar conclusions regarding the significance of the blues and jazz in America, Panish's perspective is not surprising. Still, the signifying feedback between Ellison and Murray remains in many ways a territory to be explored. In 2000, Murray and John F. Callahan compiled and edited the correspondence between the two writers and published *Trading Twelves: The Selected Letters of Ralph Ellison and Albert Murray*, a work that certainly provides substantial material to dedicate a full study on the literary and personal relationship between the two figures.

The reader will therefore find that many of the statements appearing in this chapter closely resemble Ellison's position. However, despite the fact that, as I have stated above, Murray and Ellison share the same influences and reach similar conclusions, this chapter also seeks to present Murray's greatness as a blues-idiomatic writer regardless of Ellison's shadow,[48] an approach that I strongly believe Murray also

---

> While recognizing the aesthetic entities – the blues, for example – that are specific to African American culture, they see these entities as profoundly affecting the formation of dominant American culture. However, unlike white writers and academics who have deployed these ideas, Ellison and Murray have done so from a position of respecting the integrity of the various cultural traditions that have developed in the United States, and without wanting to *replace* these traditions with a synthesized alternative. (Panish 1997: 142-143)

[48] Murray himself also seems to digress and avoid simplified conceptions of his writing as the result of an exchange between master and disciple. Rather, he views their relationship in more symbiotic terms. For the Prologue of *The Blue Devils of Nada*, Murray chose to publish a 1977 interview with Jason Berry for *Southern Booklore Magazine.* The interview serves as an introduction on Murray's basic views of what kind of a writer he considers himself to be. It begins with Berry asking if he considers there are any other writers who blend "jazz rhythms into fiction and prose" (1996: 4) in the same way he does. Murray answers: "There is Ellison of course, and there are others that I like for one reason or another, but as of now, aside from the outstanding exception of Leon Forrest, I'm unaware of any others who share either Ellison's or my involvement with the blues as a literary device" (1996: 4). Some critics, such as Sanford Pinsker, have discussed the distancing between Murray and Ellison as friends throughout the years. It is true that although Murray frequently writes and speaks about Ellison and himself answering to the same blues aesthetic, or of their encounters at Tuskegee Institute (where Ellison was a music student and Murray, a few years younger, was an English student), as he does in *South to a Very Old Place*, Murray never truly acknowledges Ellison as his master. Pinsker writes that Murray "labored many years under Ralph Ellison's very long shadow (they were classmates at Tuskegee,

deserves for his masterpiece non-fiction works, particularly *The Omni-Americans* (1970), *South to a Very Old Place* (1971), *The Hero and the Blues* (1973), *Stomping the Blues* (1976), and *The Blue Devils of Nada* (1996).

Having noted the ambivalent extent to which Ellison plays a role in Murray's writing, this chapter aims to discuss Murray's blues-idiomatic mythopoeia as it relates to universal rituals of the hero monomyth and to Signifyin(g) Theory. The corpus for analysis will consist of the non-fiction pieces listed above and the first piece of Murray's coming-of-age tetralogy, *Train Whistle Guitar*, published in 1974.[49] It is the heroic enterprise and its subsistence through the perpetuation of ritual that emerge as the themes unifying his works. The structural component of the heroic ritual appearing in blues music and in blues-oriented writing enable a comprehension of blackness in America that distances itself from the protest fiction of Richard Wright or James Baldwin, and that proclaims the necessity to re-enact and refine the heroic paradigm under the context and circumstances of race relations in the Civil Rights and Black Power eras. Like Ellison, Murray rejects the militant style of many of his contemporaries, opting instead for a literary form that, in his view, humanizes and dignifies the African American individual. Like Ellison as well, Murray's concerns require an existential and an aesthetic revolution, not a political reformation. Such an understanding can be reached through the deciphering of blues rituals and the dynamics of its temperamental modes. As we will see, these dynamics inherently involve a form of signifying, which in itself relates to the forces operating in Western myth.

---

close friends as the arc of their respective careers took very different turns, and finally, prideful antagonists when the line between master and disciple, influencer and influenced, gradually blurred)" (1996: 678).

[49] *Train Whistle Guitar* would be followed by *The Spyglass Tree* (1991), *The Seven League Boots* (1996) and *The Magic Keys* (2005).

3.5.1. Literary Heritage and Blues-Idiomatic Rituals in Murray's Non-Fiction

Murray's fascination with the blues begins with his environmental exposure to the music during his youth. Born in 1916 in Alabama, the soundtrack of his childhood was that of the classical and country blues singers as much as that of the New Orleans and Kansas City-oriented jazz styles. But it was in Tuskegee where he began to conceptualize the music in literary terms, as a result of the educational mixture that was accessible to him there. During his studies, he cultivated his taste in literature just as much as he elaborated on the meaning of jazz and the blues as an American aesthetic. The deeper he explored the blues as an idiom, the better he was able to identify and counteract the basic binarisms that were constraining the possibilities of acknowledging the music as a fine art. In the semi-autobiographical account *South to a Very Old Place*, Murray credits Professor Morteza Drexel Sprague (who also became a literary mentor for Ellison) for being open to a natural combination of the apparent antinomy:

> It was to be Mort Sprague himself with whom you shared the Auden and the current poems and essays of Eliot and the current Pound, and Kafka, and Kierkegaard, and, best of all, Thomas Mann's *Joseph* story. (Nor did he find it in the least strange that your enthusiasm for Thomas Mann's dialectic orchestration went hand in hand with your all-consuming passion for the music of Duke Ellington and Count Basie. He said it proved you were one on whom Chaucer and Shakespeare were not lost and he began a collection of blues records of his own.) (Murray 1991: 110)

From very early on, he clearly considered himself a separate kind of student. "I was already a type of person," he states in an interview with Charles H. Rowell, "from the third grade on, who thought of books and bulletin boards as windows to the world" (1997: 401).[50] The blues was all around, and young Murray would even chase it on those Tuskegee nights in

[50] It should be kept in mind that Tuskegee was initially dedicated to the formation of black students as professionals in the fields of trade, agriculture, small business administration, and education for future generations. As part of the American Reconstruction, the focus was on establishing blacks as regular citizens participating in and benefiting from the economic structure of the nation. By the time that Murray and Ellison were part of the student roster, degrees on humanities, music and liberal arts were being offered, although they were considered as secondary areas of interest. Murray relates that:

> The after-curfew darkness of Sage Hall lounge when you sat listening to Duke over the networks from Harlem: a world whose aristocracy also included Cab Calloway, the King of Hi-de-ho; Chick Webb, the stomp master of the Savoy. Then there was Earl Fatha Hines, from the Grand Terrace in Chicago; then Count Basie, who with a contingent of Blue Devils had just succeeded to Bennie Moten's old Kansas City domain. (Murray 1991: 124)

Murray's Southern background and his education at Tuskegee is worth noting for the distinct reason that he views his approach to the blues idiom in terms not unlike Hemingway's advocacy of honest prose and Eliot's and Joyce's use of the mythical method. Murray preaches that the writer's theme must be the raw material of his own experience. In the same way, "Hemingway's basic assumption is that whatever his theme, the writer will have a better chance of realizing it if he works with the raw material he has a real feeling for and with which he is intimately familiar" (Murray 1996: 173). According to Murray, Hemingway wrote passionately about hunting, bullfighting, war and local customs of the places he visited in order to "represent the whole of human experience" (1996: 173). He finds the same enterprise in Joyce and his use of the mythical method. His depiction of Irish characters transcends locality, seeking the universality of man's condition through the specific. Joyce's women, for example, are "complex and richly informed (but no less universal for being Irish)" and they represent "the Irish female to end all females" (Murray 1995: 68). Embracing his narrative strategy as his own ideal, Murray goes on to say that:

> Tuskegee was not particularly interested in what I was doing . . . You didn't score any social points or any other kind of points with the students at Tuskegee by being good at literature and the arts. Like most people I know, they were interested in owning property or having money, being successful, going into administrative jobs and some, eventually, into politics. (1997: 399-400)

Acknowledged writers like Ellison and Murray or musicians such as the jazz pianist Teddy Wilson came out of the small Alabama college with little, but effective, resources. Murray praises Professor Mort Sprague and his classmates just as much as Ellison praises the tenured professor-composer William L. Dawson. In addition to this, the library provided a literary permit beyond what was actually taught in the classroom. Murray suddenly found access to periodicals like *New Republic*, *The Nation*, *North American Review*, *Atlantic Monthly*, *Harpers*, *The New York Times Book Review* and *The Herald Tribune Book Review* as well as to European and American literary classics.

> James Joyce, who has become for so many students an archetype of the twentieth century literature cosmopolitan, always wrote out os a sensibility that became more and more sophisticated about the world at large only to become more and more Irish at the same time, even as it embraced the idea of timelessness in order to remain up to date. (1995: 69)

The writer articulates what he understands as the whole through his part, his craft, and simultaneously his part is represented in the whole. This doubly hermeneutic interplay of metonymy and synecdoche reflects Murray's own aspirations as a writer. First-hand experience on the raw material is essential, as is the need to be honest about it, and it is within this Southern, blues-cultivated experience that Murray finds the „whole', that is, the symbolic structures of universal myth. It is for this reason that the music stands as the central issue in his writing, not because of any need to celebrate black Southern culture. In other words, and contrary to the many critics who pigeonhole Murray as a regionalist, it is the blues idiom in itself which demands an interpretation that transcends localisms: "it is precisely the regional particulars that the story-teller as full-fledged artist processes or stylizes," Murray says, "but it is the universal statement he should be striving for" (1996: 12).

Murray's connections from the regional to the universal are as well bound to André Malraux's position on the role of the artist as presented in *The Voices of Silence* (1951). Malraux's image of the "Museum without Walls" (1990) resembles in itself Eliot's modernist conception of tradition. According to Malraux, the reproduction of artistic material through photography enables a new way through which not only to rearrange masterpieces, but through which the subject can develop an entirely new relationship to art. This spatial understanding of art, like the mythical method, is one that, because of its juxtaposition of syntactic modes (the language of photography and the language of the sculpture which it prints, for instance), appeals to antiquity at the same time that it does to modernity:

> Reproduction (like the art of fiction, which subdues reality to the imagination) has created what might be called „fictitious' arts, by systematically falsifying the scale of the objects; by presenting oriental seals the same size as the decorative reliefs on pillars, and amulets like statues. As a result, the imperfect finish of the smaller work, due to its limited dimensions, produces in enlargement the effect of a bold style in the modern idiom. (Malraux 1990: 24)

Such is the language of contemporary myth: the search for the atemporal through the spatial. The side-effect of the „real' museum had once been that of exterminating the context of the work of art and its function "to deepen and enhance [the art-lover's] communion with the universe" (Malraux 1990: 14). In the museum, "the practice of pitting works of art against each other, an intellectual activity, is at the opposite pole from the mood of relaxation which alone makes contemplation possible" (Malraux 1990: 14). The "Museum without Walls," on the other hand, allows the art-lover to gaze upon the "mass of works" that appear printed within a single page, freeing him "from the necessity of [the] tentative approach to the past; by revealing a style in its entirety – just as it displays an artist's work in its entirety" (Malraux 1990: 21). The "Museum without Walls," in other words, nurtures the corresponding influence between past and present, between artists separated in space as much as in time, which is to say that it capacitates the understanding of a tradition as an organic arrangement of monuments in a constant, dynamic flux.

In *The Hero and the Blues*, Murray attempts to apply Malraux's conception of tradition to blues music and blues-oriented writing. Arranged spatially, literature or music can be evaluated according to style; triumphing above the racial background of writers and musicians will be the work's own adequacy to the universal mind, the effectiveness with which the artist stylizes his own vernacular experience and translates it into the wholeness of the human condition. The artist is not the scapegoat in this process, for it is "a matter of making the most of the inevitable interaction of tradition and the individual talent" (Murray 1995: 68). Art is hence a process by which chaos is shaped into cosmos. Because every art has a tradition that is ever open and in a process of restructuring, the true artist worthy of inclusion in the canon must prove his ability by "extending, elaborating, and refining" (Murray 2000, 1996, 1991) the past. His craft becomes either an affirmation and extension of what previous artists have created or a counterstatement to them (here we return to the connections between Eliot's mythical method and Gates's Signifyin(g) Theory). The artist's role is to regulate and array the external pandemonium of meaninglessness and absurdity to enable the affirmation of life. As Murray contends as well in *Stomping the Blues*, "André Malraux might well have been referring to the blues and the function of blues musicians when he described the human condition in terms of ever-impending chaos and declared that each victory of the artist represents a triumph of man over his fate" (2000: 42). It is the responsibility

of the writer, or of any kind of artist for that matter, to acknowledge "the fundamental condition of human life as being a ceaseless struggle for form against chaos, of sense against nonsense" (Murray 1995: 16). The object of the creative process is to reach this personal stylization, and this is only possible once the artist strongly and firmly comprehends the discipline at hand. The moment in which the artist is able to distinguish himself inside the tradition is the decisive moment of improvisation, according to Murray. "By improvisation, of course, I most definitely do not mean „winging it' or making things up out of thin air," he states, "the jazz musician improvises within a very specific context and in terms of very specific idiomatic devices of compositions" (Murray 1998a: 112).

I have already examined the similitudes between Eliot's conception of tradition and Signifyin(g) Theory. Having established Murray's overall concern with the role of art and the function of the vernacular and the universal within any given aesthetic, we shall now turn to his focus on the dynamics of heroism in the blues idiom. Although Murray continues to depict such dynamics under the scope of Malraux, Eliot, or Hemingway, I aim to further his use of myth and ritual by considering Signifyin(g) Theory as an additional tool from which to approach the blues and his blues-oriented writing. Antagonistic cooperation, I believe, not only resembles Signifyin(g) Theory as much as Eurocentric archetypal theory, but also, when considered in a blues-idiomatic context, reveals traces of the specifically African American experience that can be better identified through Signifyin(g) Theory. While in the previous chapter I used Signifyin(g) Theory to decipher the politics implicit in Armstrong's performative gestures, in this chapter the focus shifts to the categories of archetypes and the rituals structuring the universal hero's monomyth. In both cases, the advocacy becomes essentially the same: the celebration of the blues as a tragicomic aesthetic and the rejection of black protest fiction for its deficiency as a viable instrument in the struggle for racial justice and equality.

In item 3.2. I foreshadowed Murray's deconstruction of the blues through antagonistic cooperation when I commented the contestation between the statements and the temperament delivered in the lyrics and the forward drive of the rhythm and the vocal subtleties creating mocking, parodying or dramatizing effects. Indeed, this contestation goes deep beyond these operating forces. Murray draws on archetypal theory to identify the images prevalent in universal myth within the blues: above all, his

mythopoeia revolves around the conceptual images of the hero and the dragon. The hero is not only incarnated by the musician, but also by those who enact the ritual of the apparent oxymoron of antagonistic cooperation through dancing and stomping. The dragon, on the other hand, represents the chaos and confusion propagated by racism and poverty.

This chthonic force (the dragon) appears in the music under the form of what Murray calls "the blues as such" (2000), by which he means the state of mind of depression, anguish or despair haunting the speaker. Murray traces the origin of this meaning of the word „blue' all the way back to the mid-sixteenth century, when the expression „to look blue' signified "to suffer anxiety, fear, discomfort, and low spirits" (2000: 63). Indeed, the appearance of the blues as a phantom-like entity, a sort of torturing spectrum or trickster is common in all forms of blues styles. In Bessie Smith's "In the House Blues," to give the reader an example, "the blues as such" take the form of a sort of devilish, invisible and inaudible being that subvert the speaker's relationship to her private sphere, her household:

> Sitting in the house with everything on my mind
> Sitting in the house with everything on my mind
> Looking at the clock and can't even tell the time
>
> Walking to my window, and looking out of my door
> Walking to my window, and looking out of my door
> Wishing that my man would come home once more
>
> Can't eat, can't sleep, so weak I can't walk my floor
> Can't eat, can't sleep, so weak I can't walk my floor
> Feel like hollering murder, let the police squad get me once more
>
> They woke me up before day with trouble on my mind
> They woke me up before day with trouble on my mind
> Wringing my hands and screaming, walking the floor hollering and crying
>
> Catch them, don't let them blues in here
> Catch them, don't let them blues in here
> They shakes me in my bed, can't sit down in my chair
>
> Oh, the blues has got me on the go
> Oh, they've got me on the go
> They runs around my house, in and out of my front door (B. Smith 1993a)

The stark contrast between the motionless, stagnant qualities of the house and the racing restlessness of the speaker merge to create a suffocating atmosphere that both isolates and insulates the subject. The house becomes an asphyxiating entity where the pace of thought is dismembered from the stiffer, more stationary position of the body. The speaker is weary; elements intended to provide comfort, such as the bed and the chair, are disquieting. She looks to the outer world from the inside; the house swallows her deeper within as she runs from the blues, depicted as an embodied, torturing element.

The object of blues music, which is not to be mistaken with "the blues as such," is to re-enact the epic battle between hero (the musician or dancer) and dragon ("the blues as such") in a titanic effort to once again reaffirm life. The tragedy of the lyrics is again counterstated by a comic act: the will to confront and survive, to be nimble and dexterous in the face of adversity, to look into the eyes of the fire-breathing dragon and find the courage to slay it.

This ceremonious ritual is recreated by its life-affirming practitioners every Saturday night at the dance hall, the temple of blues music. Cyclically, the heroes confront the dragons in what Murray calls the ritual of the "Saturday Night Function" (2000). It is not only the temple that is specifically African American; the vernacular aspects involved also structure the very process of antagonistic cooperation. Indeed, the slaying in itself can be regarded as a form of motivated signifying whereupon the dragon is subdued through performative enactments of parody. The characteristic laughter of African American culture is not only present, but becomes the indispensable tool leading to victory. Particular to the Saturday Night Function is "the irrepressible joyousness, the downright exhilaration, the rapturous delight in sheer physical existence" (Murray 2000: 20). After all, "the fundamental function of the blues musician (also known as the jazz musician) . . . is not only to drive the blues away and hold them at bay at least for the time being, but also to evoke an ambiance of Dyonisian revelry in the process" (Murray 2000: 19). This Dyonisian revelry resembles the courageous spunk of the Monkey as he makes a fool of the Lion. Let us remember that one of the underlying motives behind the Monkey's signifying was mere amusement at the possibility of role-reversal. What is particularly African American about the Saturday Night Function is that despite the seriousness of its epic dimensions (the struggle against racial prejudice), it is performed through a ceremony that retains the life-affirming joviality of the spring or marriage rites. This does not imply rudeness or

an unpolished display of skill, nor does it imply an overlooking of the gravity of the threat personified by the dragon. What it represents is the most perfected counterstatement to tragedy and absurdity to expose the farce of the American experience in a manner not unlike the style of Mark Twain. Dyonisian revelry and the epic task of the hero thus come together within a single rite:

> Blues musicians play music not only in the theatrical sense that actors play or stage a performance, but also in the general sense of playing for recreation, as when participating in games of skill. They also play in the sense of gambolling, in the sense that is to say, of fooling around or kidding around with, toying with, or otherwise having fun with. Sometimes they also improvise and in the process they elaborate, extend, and refine. But what they do in all instances involves the technical skill, imagination, talent, and eventually the taste that adds up to artifice. (Murray 2000: 87)

The circumstance of the black individual in America generates the necessity for heroic action (as opposed to mere protest). Antagonistic cooperation, whether in archetypal or signifying terms, is a balanced structure, one where the courage of the hero must at least be proportional to the threat of the dragon:

> The outlying regions, the sinister circumstances beyond statistics, *cooperate* with the hero by virtue of the very fact of and nature of their existence. They help beget real-life and storybook heroes alike, not only by generating the necessity for heroism in the first place but also by contesting its development at every stage and by furnishing the occasion for its fulfilment. Indeed, since in the final analysis the greatness of the hero can be measured only in scale with the mischief, malaise, or menace he can dispatch, the degree of cooperation is always equal to the amount of antagonism. (Murray 1995: 39)

But what kind of heroic archetype is the one that the blues-idiomatic hero endorses, according to Murray? Northrop Frye described the possible variations of the archetype through fictional modes: the hero may be superior in *kind* to other men and to his environment; he may be superior in *degree* to other men and to his environment; he may be superior in degree to other men, but not to his environment; he may be neither superior to other men not to his environment; or he may be inferior in power and intelligence to other men (1973: 61). The blues-idiomatic hero must always at least try to be levelled with other people and with his surrounding environment. Overall, he must have a very deep knowledge and understanding of the world around him. Blues

musicians are not superior in kind to other people or to the environment. They may be superior in degree, in terms of aesthetic sensibility, but never in terms of social birthright.

More than any other musical style, the blues is constructed on the basis of signifying. In other popular genres, the act of ritual counterstatement is absent, and the message is oriented towards a single, unequivocal effect, which is to say that these other musical forms are devoid of the hermeneutic possibilities of double discourse. Whereas in the blues the message delivered by the dragon is mastered, subdued, and controlled in the effort to produce a ritual aimed towards the opposite effect (that is, the dragon's message is interpreted through a contesting rhetoric, which is to say that the common linguistic correspondence between signifier and signified is imploded and disrupted), other musical forms revolve around the tragic affirmation and confirmation of chaos. As opposed to epic heroism, they are built on the basis of a sentimentality that favors defeat. For example,

> Soul and rock almost always place primary emphasis on a one-dimensional earnestness that all too easily deteriorates into a whinning self-pity or a highly amplified tantrum of banging and crashing and screaming and stomping that obviously has far more to do with the intensification of a mood of despair than with getting rid of any demons of gloom. (Murray 2000: 51)

Similarly, "when a hillbilly musician or country-and-Western musician plays or sings a lament, the music is likely to reinforce the mood of melancholia and longing," but in the blues, "even the most solemn words of a dirge will not only be counterstated by the mood of earthy well-being . . . but may even be mocked by the jazziness of the instrumentation" (Murray 2000: 68).

The signifying rituals involved in the blues idiom are what condone a meaning of the music that states quite the opposite from the definitions and beliefs constructed around the primitivist myth. There is an errouneous assumption "implicit in those misdefinitions which confuse the music with the blues as such in the first place: that what is said is more important than the way it is said. It is not" (2000: 76), Murray claims. The rhetoric of the blues ritual of antagonistic cooperation is one based on double interpretation, the misleading of the dragon into the hero's life-affirming terrain, the manipulation of language through a rhetoric based on irony and parody.

The skill with which the blues hero subdues the dragon makes a triumphing aesthetic statement that goes beyond the sphere of the music itself. By viewing the blues under the scope of antagonistic cooperation (and by extension, as I argue, through Signifyin(g) Theory), Murray is not only making a case of the music as a heroic ritual, but is also delivering a counterstament against what he terms the folklore or "fakelore of white supremacy" (1990). In jazz or blues writing, the "fakelore" can be traced back to the primitivist myths and the high art / popular entertainment dichotomy that I examined in Parts 1 and 2 of this dissertation. The "fakelore" begins in the tautological correspondence between the blues and "the blues as such," an assumption that for all his enthusiasm and passion for the music, was made by Hugues Panassié. Murray contends that Panassié's definition of the aesthetic as torch music of primitive lamentation for systematic relief "contains perhaps as much confusion and nonsense as facts and insights" (2000: 62). Moreover, he dismisses Panassié's endeavor to present Africa as the quintessential mythical place of creation (at the expense of American and European influences) as a falsity: "It is far more accurate to say that some of the most distinctive *elements* of blues music were derived from the music of *some* of the West African ancestors of U.S. Negroes," Murray writes, "than it is to imply, however obliquely, that the blues idiom itself ever existed anywhere on the continent of Africa" (2000: 63). In a personal letter to Ralph Ellison, Murray also had harsh words for another acknowledged early jazz critic, André Hodeir: "I for one am not impressed with Hodeir's learning, his „theory' of jazz, or his ability as an arranger," he claims. "He is obviously a brilliant guy, the only trouble is he doesn't know what the hell he is talking about, and he is another one of these squares who want to legislate the course of jazz" (Ellison and Murray 2000: 202).

These critics have, Murray opines, failed to make an accurate interpretation of the blues-idiomatic heroic ritual. Their condescending and biased views have spread all the way to dictionary definitions of blues music, and they are rooted in a middle-class fake intellectualism, a system which nurtures and reinforces the ills of such definitions. Stanley Crouch, who picked up on Ellison's and Murray's ideas, expressed how *Stomping the Blues* "dismissed much of the prep school WASP jazz writing on the one hand, and unseated the Jewish riders of the rickety and the wooden socio-moralistic stallions on the other" (1990: 47). Murray brings up the high art / folk expression antinomy as well to attack mystified accounts of the blues. He dismisses the common

notion of the music as a form of folkloric expression while advocating its status as a "fine art" (2000). The basis for Murray's defense argument is that blues musicians are experimental; they extend, elaborate and refine the technique that has previously been used in the search of their own individual voice. From a very precise way of handling the idiom geniuses are born, but in order to truly become one they must be careful not to lose control of their own innovations, for this would "degenerate into pretentious display and a mindless pursuit of novelty for its own sake" (Murray 2000: 212). While the role of the folk artist is to perpetuate a tradition in a static sense (that is, his best performance will be one in which he can show his skill in repeating what he has been taught and what the public, through several generations, is intimately familiar with), the blues musician expands the basics in search of uniqueness while showing off not just his technical ability, but his profound originality. In other words, folk is conventional, predictable, and "it conforms to rigorously restrictive local, regional, which is to say provincial ground rules that have been so completely established and accepted as to require little if any enforcement as such beyond initiation and apprenticeship instruction" (Murray 2000: 204), while fine arts such as the blues aim for innovation. Both forms of art work upon a tradition, and therefore both are kept alive through imitation; but where the folk tradition is fixed and inactive, the fine arts tradition is organic. Much of the belief that the blues is folk art derives, Murray suggests, from the impact of nature and the wilderness in great American myths and pastoral European poetry:

> But after all what really seems to underlie most of the notions of those who prefer folk art to fine art are the same old essentially sentimental assumptions that make for pastoral literature (and for political theories about noble savages). Thus, much the same as pastoral poetry presents its rustics as being on better terms with life than courtiers because they are closer to nature, so would promoters of folk art as the true art have you believe that a provincial musical sensibility is somehow a greater endowment than a more cosmopolitan sensibility plus a greater mastery of technique. It absolutely is not. (2000: 212)

On the other extreme are those jazz enthusiasts and musicians who do regard the music as a fine art but become prey to the pedantic intellectualization of the idiom. Those who attempt to categorize jazz and the blues as a high art often make the fatal mistake of stripping the music from its most ancestral ritual: dancing. To neglect the

dance hall and proclaim the concert hall as the new temple is a detrimental step to the significance of the tradition, for it deprives the music from the enactment of the Dyonisian revelry characteristic of black American culture. Murray insists that the blues still answers to "the fundamental personal and social function of percussive incantation, purification and fertility rituals, and ceremonies of affirmation . . . Such rituals and ceremonies are precisely what their work is very much about" (2000: 230). To take the dancing away is to extinguish the social atmosphere that most vividly reflects the vernacular contribution to the music. The stomping and hopping, the nonchalance, the jazz talk among „cats,'[51] the costume dressing and other mannerisms are habits of the pleasure-oriented ritual. Incantation involves the practice of a magic spell. In the metaphorical sense, Murray is alluding to the seductiveness of the ritual, the search for pleasure whether this is of a sexual nature or just a matter of enjoying the atmosphere. By purification he refers to the act of driving away "the blues as such," slaying the dragon, for the time being at least. As a sort of fertility ritual, the blues idiom must not be completely separated from Storyville, where it was born. This is a straight attack directed against the self-proclaimed admirers of jazz who sought to establish the concert hall as the best arena for jazz to be performed. Murray does not say that jazz should not be taken to concert halls, but that no matter the new types of venues, the sessions cannot and should not disappear from the ballrooms, juke joints, honky-tonks and speakeasies. It is not to be forgotten that jazz developed as a dance-oriented music, and the choreographic routines are as much an image of the affirmation of life, of counterstating and slaying dragons as the music is:

> Because such dance steps as consisted of bumping and bouncing, dragging and stomping, hopping and jumping, rocking and rolling, shaking and shouting, and the like, were (and are) precisely what all the percussive incantation was (and still is) all about in the first place; and obviously such movements add up to a good time regardless the lyrics. Purification and celebration/affirmation without a doubt. (2000: 138)

Far from touching upon the political, all blues rituals remain of an existential nature. Improvisation in the blues, whether through solos or dance steps, is the rite that allows

[51] The term 'cats' has been used since the late 1920s by jazz musicians to refer to their peers. Murray sustains that it was Armstrong who first applied the word in the jazz circles, therefore contributing to the formation of a blues-idiomatic spoken language (2000: 238).

tradition to continue through experimentation. Through a process of trial and error, the truly grand innovations become a naturalized part of the tradition. “Perhaps a better word for experimentation as it actually functions in the arts is improvisation” (1995: 72), Murray declares, alluding simultaneously to Eliot and Malraux.

Murray does not implode the mystifying process through the fusion of the two components of the binarism, as Alice Walker does in some cases, but by regarding the blues as an aesthetic belonging to the opposing component, the one at the higher level of the hierarchy. Murray gives the names of those who have stylized the blues idiom to its state of perfection, those who began their craft through emulation but then sought experimentation. Highly influenced by Ellison, it is not surprising that the names are those of Louis Armstrong, Jimmy Rushing, Charlie Christian, George Benson, Count Basie, and of course, Duke Ellington. In terms of the latter, Murray marks the parallels between his use of the vernacular and the strategy employed by the great American writers:

> Those who regard Ellington as the most representative American composer have good reason. Not unlike Emerson, Melville, Whitman, Twain, Hemingway, and Faulkner in literature, he quite obviously has converted more of the actual texture and vitality of American life into first-rate universally appealing music than anybody else. Moreover he has done so in terms of such vernacular devices of blues musicianship as vamps, riffs, breaks, fills, call-and-response sequences, idiomatic syncopation, down-home folk timbres, drum-oriented horns, strings, and so on. (2000: 224)

Ellington’s use of vernacular imagery, aesthetic structures and onomatopoeia are moreover similar to Joyce’s use of Irishness, to put another example of a writer who has transcended from the personal to the universal. Signifyin(g) Theory’s stress on the vernacular, as I have contended several times, resembles the mythical method in this hermeneutical process.

The use of the vernacular is not to be confused with the role of folk art. The vernacular represents a cultural tool, an element for the individual to use as his “equipment for living.” Moreover, it is open to the subject’s experimentation with it. An artist of any given fine art discipline must go through a series of rites of initiation, the final, perfecting stage being that of experimentation. He begins through emulation, and then extends, elaborates and refines his technique. Tradition, for Eliot and Malraux as much as for Gates and Murray, consists of a negotiation with the past: “Never do we

find an epoch-making form built up without a struggle with another form; not one problem of the artist's vision but is conditioned by the past" (Malraux 1990: 271). Murray discredits myths about the blues and jazz musician's automatism in reflecting his feelings (a belief, as we have seen, deriving from the primitivist myth) by appealing to the rituals of emulation and improvisation. The blues genius not only uses the vernacular to express the universal, he moreover does so by paying tribute to the past and respecting the evolution of the idiom, to which he supplies his own vision and sound. It is in this past where he finds the rhetoric to measure up to the dragon:

> What makes a blues idiom musician is not the ability to express *raw* emotion with primitive directness, as is so often implied, but rather the mastery of elements of esthetics peculiar to U.S. Negro music. Blues musicians do not derive directly from the personal, social, and political circumstances of their lives as black people in the United States. They derive most directly from styles of other musicians who play the blues and who were infinitely more interested in evoking or simulating raw emotion than releasing it – and whose ‚*primitiveness*' is to be found not so much in the *directness* of their expression as in their pronounced emphasis on stylization. (Murray 1995: 83)

Lastly, the art of signifying through musical and dance rhetorical devices also represents the subsistence of the vernacular within the form.[52] The final words of *Stomping the Blues* rather sum up the entire dynamic of the blues hero and the idiom's rituals. Contrary to the argumentative path that Murray tends to take throughout his non-fiction (by which he begins in the vernacular and conduces the reader to the universal), he closes the book in the opposite direction, returning to the Southern home in a final, evocative conglomeration of images:

> When the storybook hero is reported to have lived happily ever after his triumph over the dragon, it is not to be assumed that he is able to retire but rather that what he has been through should make him more insightful, more skilful, more resilient, and hence better prepared to cope with eventualities.

[52] It must be said that although Murray does not use Signifyin(g) Theory, basically by virtue of the fact that he published much of his jazz non-fiction prior to Gates's study, the weight of signifying linguistic displays such as the dozens, lying, boasts and toats is not lost on him. More often than not, however, he continues to use the less climactic term 'counterstatement' to illustrate antagonistic cooperation. 'Counterstatement,' perhaps, connotes universal paradigms more accurately than 'signifying' can aspire to, for the latter more strongly suggests a focus upon the vernacular.

> Because there will always be other dragons, which after all are as much a part of the nature of things as is bad weather.
>
> Nor has anybody been able to get rid of the blues forever either. You can only drive them away and keep them at bay for the time being. Because they are always there, as if always waiting and watching. So retirement is out of the question. But even so old pro as you have become, sometimes all you have to hear is the also and also of the drummer signifying on the high-hat cymbal, even in the distance (and it is as if it were the also and also of time itself whispering red alert as if in blue italics), and all you have to do to keep them in their proper place, which is deep in the dozens, is to pat your feet and snap your fingers. (2000: 258)

Blues-idiomatic heroes represent the gargoyles protecting from existential uncertainties and tribulations. The dragon, because of its fantastic and mystical nature, is the ultimate conglomeration of the tragedy, the farce, and the absurdity of life. It represents many things: chaos, entropy, racism, pandemonium, futility, pain, the alluring temptation of succumbing and inaction. The dragon is alive and it is ever-threatening and aggressive; if the hero refuses to confront him, he will be burnt under his breath of fire.

3.5.2. The Hero Monomyth in *Train Whistle Guitar*

I now turn to examine how these heroic rituals are shaped by Murray into fictional narrative in *Train Whistle Guitar*. Structured thematically, the novel revolves around the early of years of Scooter, a young boy living in Gasoline Point, in Mobile, Alabama (a fictionalized version of Murray's own Magazine Point, where he was raised by his adoptive parents). Each of the novels of the tetralogy narrates a period of maturation in the life of Scooter. The coming-of-age saga follows the character/narrator as he first stylizes an attitude out of the material of his "briarpatch," becomes an apprentice of jazz musicianship, leaves for college to explore his great potential as a scholar, takes a break from college to tour with a jazz band, and finally becomes integrated in the New York literary and jazz circles.[53] The anatomical vignettes of *Train*

[53] The saga follows the traditional patterns of a *Bildungsroman* rather transparently as each of the novels constitutes a period of Scooter's maturation in which he encounters and defeats new dragons. Following *Train Whistle Guitar*, Murray published *The Spyglass Tree*, which narrates Scooter's Alabama college experiences, from where he widens his world view. The narration ends when the local blues singer, significantly named Hortense Hightower, gifts him with a bass fiddle so that he may shape

Whistle are textured with colourful characters of the South: from Scooter's own family to the school environment, from the church folks to the sassy girls he has intercourse with, from his companion Little Buddy Marshall to war veterans, blues musicians, and other memorable townspeople. As Scooter relates the anecdotes that bind him to these characters, he offers a vision of a sort of mythical, organic land complete with villains (the white perckerwoods), protective mothers (Miss Melba and Aunt Tee), figures of wisdom (Miss Lexine Metcalf), epic frontiersmen „fathers' (Luzana Cholly and Stagolee Dupas, *fils*), „princesses' (Deljean McCray, Charlene Wingate, Elva Lois Shower) and sidekicks (Little Buddy Marshall). These figures enable Scooter to emerge as a worthy hero in control of his stride; he becomes a disciplined individual capable of maintaining grace under pressure, of elegantly confronting adversity with the courage necessary to slay the dragon. As a narrator, he reveals his understanding of his experience as indispensable for the development of his "equipment for living"; the fact that the chapters are structured thematically alludes to the triumphal overcoming of tasks and initiation rites. The final crossing of the threshold is the realization of how that space and those characters constitute an essential part of his emotional development. Although not stated explicitly, Scooter as a narrator conveys the idea that

---

his heroic attitude into musical form. In *The Seven League Boots*, Scooter takes a break from college and joins The Bossman Himself's Band on their tour. The last novel, *The Magic Keys*, is probably the least climactic work of all. By now Scooter has returned to college and has settled down with his 'princess.' Scooter recalls the 'magic keys' that have led his life to the existentially-sucessful position he finds himself in.

Scooter is meant to become a source of inspiration both in terms of action and attitude. Perhaps it has been Murray's exhaustive efforts to render his protagonist as a character worthy of emulation, as a creation from which the reader is meant to understand that life can (and should) imitate art, what in the end has often backfired on him as a writer. The last three novels of the saga were neither as ambitious, nor did they reach the critical acclaim that *Train Whistle Guitar* did. Warren Carson, who praised the first novel for its memorable vignettes of Southern black life, nevertheless had only harsh words for *The Spyglass Tree*, deeming the novel as overall "unimpressive" (1993: 295). Scooter, so perfected inside his heroic skin, resulted far from surprising, or attractive as a character: "Essentially, Scooter behaves as we expect him to behave, achieves what we expect him to achieve, and thanks and celebrates whom and what we know he will, based on the course he set in *Train Whistle Guitar*" (Carson 1993: 295).

he has learnt to regard his environment in accordance with archetypal structures and the dynamics of antagonistic cooperation.

In the first vignette Scooter provides a visual description from the vantage point of his chinaberry tree. As a narrator, he has learnt to regard his past in archetypal terms: "Once upon a time [Gasoline Point] was also the briarpatch, which is why my nickname was then Scooter, and is also why the chinaberry tree (that was even as tall as any fairy tale beanstalk) was, among other things, my spyglass tree" (Murray 1998b: 3).[54] As a child, it seems he was already gifted with the self-conscious vision to regard himself in some heroic sense. Although he does not yet have the maturity to understand the epic proportions that such a vision implies, he appears to pick up hints of the folk material available to him in Gasoline Point. The second vignette begins as follows:

> I used to say My name is also Jack the Rabbit because my home is in the briarpatch, and Little Buddy (than whom there never was a better riddle buddy) used to say Me my name is Jack the Rabbit also because my home is also in the also and also of the briarpatch because that is also where I was also bred and also born. And when I also used to say My name is also Jack the Bear he always used to say My home is also nowhere and also anywhere and also everywhere. (4)

This passage is significant for two reasons. Firstly, the "also and also" riff alludes to the natural development of the hero, which in itself mirrors the natural development of the aesthetic tradition. Scooter's appreciation of the "also and also" is a simplification of Murray's professing of the elaboration, extension, and refinement of technique. Scooter is foreshadowing his posterior development as a jazz musician in subsequent novels, a talent that is shown to be rooted in the acquisition of the cultural tools provided by his immediate environment in Gasoline Point.[55] Two years later, Murray would write in *Stomping the Blues* that:

---

[54] Hereafter all citations from *Train Whistle Guitar* will be indicated solely through page number.

[55] Although the novels constituting the saga are bridged by years (and even decades) in their publication, the correspondence between Murray and Ellison shows that as early as in the 1950s Murray was working on notes and the structuring of a jazz-based novel. This novel-in-progress was eventually conceptually divided into a saga and written in accordance with the initiation rites Scooter must go through. It is important, therefore, to keep in mind when approaching *Train Whistle Guitar* that Murray

> The identity of each individual artist consists mainly of that unique combination of what he accepts among all the existing examples of stylization and is trying to extend, elaborate, and refine and maybe even transcend (as if to say: Yes, yes, yes, and also and also) on the one hand, and what he rejects as inadequate and misleading on the other and tries to counterstate with his own output (as if to say: No, no, no; this is the way I see it, hear it, feel it). (2000: 205)

Secondly, the narrator's reference to Jack the Rabbit and Jack the Bear allude to the heroic figures of black oral tales. Like the Monkey tales, during slavery and the Reconstruction, the Rabbit fables were allegories of the subversion and reversal of power relationships. The Rabbit was often the animal that black Americans chose to personify them. The small creature is nothing in strength compared to the oversized wolf and bear, yet he is able to outwit his enemy. Lawrence Levine summarizes the story of the Rabbit, the Wolf and the briarpatch in the following manner:

> Knowing Rabbit's curiosity and vanity, Wolf constructs a tar-baby and leaves it by the side of the road. At first fascinated by this stranger and then progressively infuriated at its refusal to respond to its friendly salutations, Rabbit strikes at it with his hands, kicks it with his feet, butts it with his head, and becomes thoroughly enmeshed. In the end, however, it is the Rabbit whose understanding of his adversary proves to be more profound. Realizing that Wolf will do exactly what he thinks his victim least desires, Rabbit convinces him that of all the ways to die the one he is most afraid of is being thrown into the briarpatch, which of course is what Wolf promptly does, allowing Rabbit to escape. (1978: 106)

The Rabbit is familiar with the briarpatch; he has been raised there. It is a barbed thicket in which he could easily get wounded, but his proficiency in dexterously moving inside of it allows for the space to become his protective fort of thorns.[56] Similarly, the

---

had already conceptually conceived the monomyth of his hero, and that, in an effort to develop a balanced arrangement of his characters and motifs, analepsis and prolepsis of the hero's attitude become an essential aspect of the author's narrative strategies.

[56] If we recall Ellison's remarks against Stanley Edgar Hyman's short-sightedness, in which he proclaimed to identify more readily with Ulysses than with a rabbit, we find that in contrast and in this regard, Murray is perhaps more at the disposal of black oral-tale imagery than Ellison. Ellison of course acknowledged the heroic parallels between the universal and the folklore hero, but he was perhaps critical of the consequences the usage of this animalesque personification entailed. In a personal letter

potentially hostile environment of the segregated Gasoline Point could break Scooter's spirit, yet the skills he has developed in such an environment only make him stronger, smarter and wittier. Scooter's is a continual rebirth, and it is expressed through alternative names that raise images pertaining to heroism, trickery and survival. His many rebirths all in all add up to the inevitable fall from innocence to experience; but Scooter is anything but a passive subject, for he takes heroic strides towards his right to lead a dignified and happy life. "The trick is to get more lore *into* the novel," Murray once wrote to Ellison, "so that it becomes a part of that tradition. . . . Ulysses is both Jack the Rabbit (when the Cyclops gets after his ass) and Jack the Bear" (Ellison and Murray 2000: 166). The blues-idiomatic hero is nothing without his down-home context and circumstance: "What makes the Alabama jackrabbit so nimble, so resilient, so elegantly resourceful? The briarpatch!" (2001: 6), Murray declares.

What makes Scooter's heroism exceptionally blues-idiomatic? On the one hand, Murray conceived his protagonist as a Hemingway-like hero, which, in turn, he deemed as particularly blues-oriented. In *The Hero and the Blues* and *The Blues Devils of Nada* (the title derives from Hemingway's story, "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place"),[57] Murray establishes the parallels between the attitudes involved in the overcoming of blues

---

to Murray in which he continued to attack Hyman, he expressed his contempt at the critics' tendency to sway away from the strictly literary analysis when it came to black writers: "These fucks are so impressed that Joyce used myth to organize *Ulysses*, and they miss completely the fact that for all a novelist's interest in folklore or myth, he uses it as a novelist, not as an anthropologist or a teller of folktales" (Ellison and Murray 2000: 184).

[57] In Hemingway's story, two waiters, at the end of their shift in a Spanish café, find themselves confronting the emptiness of existence:

> What did he fear? It was not fear or dread. It was nothing that he knew too well. It was all a nothing and a man was nothing too. It was only that and light was all it needed and a certain cleanness and order. Some lived in it and never felt it but knew it all was nada y pues nada y nada y pues nada. Our nada who art in nada, nada be thy kingdom nada thy will be nada in nada as it is in nada. Give us this nada our daily nada and nada us our nada as we nada our nadas and nada us not into nada but deliver us from nada; pues nada. Hail nothing full of nothing, nothing is with thee. (Hemingway 1993: 436-437)

The external pandemonium reflected in Hemingway's work was one that Murray imitated to the end. What Murray terms "the blues as such" is that nature in the raw, that "nada" with the potential to become a dragon.

rituals and the attitudes shaping not only the way Hemingway conceived the rituals of bullfighting, but the heroic temperament of his heroes as well. The antagonistic cooperation characteristic of bullfighting (where the bull is the dragon incarnate) is similar to the blues in terms of the grace and elegance with which the hero operates. The blues "state the facts of life . . . and proceed in spite of, and even in terms of, the ugliness and meaness of the human condition" (Murray 1995: 36). Scooter comes to terms with what hand life has dealt him in a manner quite like that of Hemingway's heroes. We follow Scooter through episodes of dreadful violence (his discovery of a white corpse floating in a swamp, his witnessing of the deadly encounter between Stagolee Dupas and the town sheriff, the story of how Bea Ella became Red Ella when she stabbed her lover to death on the street) and yet Scooter as a narrator does not dwell on the pain and the fear he felt as a child. Scooter is scared and he and Little Buddy Marshall run off when they see the corpse, yet his sense of adventure and courage overshadows the possibility of letting that experience turn him into a victim, and he returns to see how the bootleggers strip and get rid of the body. In the same line, he characterizes the murder of the sheriff as suicide because he had brought it upon himself when he provoked Stagolee Dupas. These cases serve to illustrate the way Scooter deals with negative experiences. In the case of Red Ella, he has sufficient insight to understand the violent episode under blues-idiomatic terms, while most of the other members maintain a more superficial understanding of the nickname:

> Papa Gumbo Willie McWorthy called it red murder, and that was how Bea Ella Thornhill became Red Ella from then on, which seemed to make most people remember seeing her streaked with blood sitting alone in the boarding house steps waiting to confess. But Little Buddy and I knew that Papa Gumbo Willie McWorthy had said red because what he was really talking about was the blues. Because he was responding to what Vanderbilt Coleman had said was Bea Ella Thornhill's biggest mistake of all: Not knowing that bad luck and disappointment meant not the end of the world but only that being human you have to suffer like everybody else from time to time. (122)

Scooter is characteristically Hemingway-like; a transposition of Jake Barnes or Nick Adams into the skin of a black child. Refuting the early, traditional opinion that critics had held about Hemingway, according to which his characters respond to a code of honor and bear an impenetrable toughness, Murray offers another perspective: "The

Hemingway hero," he writes, "is not as hard as nails and fearless. He is a man who can pull himself together and press on . . . in spite, or even because of, his fears and weaknesses" (1996: 191).[58] Neither is Scooter meant to be interpreted as an oddly brave child, but as a talented and gifted one when it comes to action because he is able to confront adversity with fortitude and intrepidity.

The second reason that makes Scooter's heroism exceptionally blues-idiomatic is his choice of figures to emulate: Luzana Cholly, a blues-guitar player, and Stagolee Dupas, the local blues piano master. More than any other characters, they bear the Hemingway-hero trademark, and they are at the same time proficient in the art of signifying. For the sake of brevity, and because they represent very similar roles, I shall focus only on the former. Luzana Cholly, Murray declared in an interview, "is Odysseus, Beowulf . . . and all the heroes to Scooter" (Murray and Gelfand 1997: 10). The syntax of imagery through which Luzana is engraved in Scooter's memory is evocative of the blues-based scenario:

> I can remember being aware of Luzana Cholly all the way back there in the blue meshes of that wee winking blinking and nod web of bedtime story time when I couldn't yet follow the threads of the yarns I was to realize later on that somebody was forever spinning about something he had done . . . saying old Luzana and old Luzana and old Luze, and I didn't know what, to say of where Louisiana was.
>
> But already I knew who he himself was even then, and I could see him very clearly whenever they said his name because I still can't remember any point in time when I had not already seen him coming up that road from around the bend and down in the L&N railroad bottom. Nor can I remember when I had not yet heard him playing the blues on his guitar as if he were also an engineer telling tall tales on a train whistle, his left hand doing most of the talking including the laughing and signifying as well as the moaning and crying and even the whinning, while his right hand thumped the wheels going somewhere. (7-8)

[58] Murray was not the only one to hold such an opinion on Hemingway's characters. In his 1961 study, *Hemingway*, Stewart Sanderson made a similar appreciation:

> The Hemingway hero is not, as many people have thought, a tough, hard-boiled brute obsessed by an appetite for blood-sports, drink, and women. He is, on the contrary, deeply sensitive, hard-bitten rather than hard-boiled, and suffering profoundly from the fang-marks of experience. It is only by being tough with himself that he can survive, perhaps by dealing in death that he can accept the fact of death. (1961: 34)

The amount of images is overwhelming. Luzana is associated with bedtime stories; in fact, he is prior to them. Bedtime stories generally involve heroes, living in some sort of castle and confronting some sort of dragon; and yet Scooter has gained his awareness of heroism through Luzana by the time that he has read these stories. While many of the town members are appalled by Luzana's ways, Scooter lets nothing but veneration roam his feelings. The name Luzana Cholly is powerfully associated with the Southern state of Louisiana even before Scooter learns the importance of place and geography from his chinaberry tree and from the maps and the globes he studies in Miss Lexine Metcalf's class. But most importantly, Luzana automatically evokes the image of trains, a characteristic symbol of the blues idiom. The train is not only an allusion to the Underground Railroad and to the migrations during the Reconstruction; it is furthermore a recurrent symbol onomatopoeically reproduced by jazz and blues musicians. The locomotive, which was a recurring musical motif in Ellington's pieces, is the emblem of the folk singers and travellers carrying their guitar and their harmonica in search of a better opportunity in life. Luzana comes and goes out of Gasoline Point by hopping on freight trains, and he plays his guitar in a way that resembles train engines. While his left hand creates the signifying effects of laughing, moaning, crying and so on, his right hand marches to the forward rhythm. In a previous excerpt, Scooter declares that steel blue is the color that best suits Luzana, for it is "the clean, oil-smelling color of gunmetal and the gray-purple patina of freight train engines and railroad slag" (7). Luzana is a warrior as much as a poet, or more accurately, he has a poetic sensibility because he is a warrior. Hence the title of the novel, for the train whistle guitar is the symbolic source from which Scooter makes form out of cataclysm; it is the relentless image from which he orders and stylizes the raw material of life.

Warren Carson synthesizes all of Luzana's attributes: he is "a sharp-dressing, guitar-playing, card-gambling, sporty-limp-walking, tobacco-chewing, ass-kicking, no-shit-taking, lady-loving, prison-serving, train-hopping, rail-riding legend" (1993: 291). Despite the „low' or vulgar nature of his habits, his presence demands a dignity that is unsettling to whites and surprises blacks, who mostly call him "crazy" in the sense of being a "fool" (13). Scooter does neither deem him as immoral nor as a fool, but as a figure who has the key to commanding respect because he has deciphered the complex codes and strategies for survival in the hostile world of segregation:

> As for going bad, that was the last thing [Luzana Cholly] needed to do, since everybody, black or white, who knew anything at all about him already knew that when he made a promise he meant it if it's the last thing I do, if it's the last thing I'm able to do in this earth. Which everybody also knew meant if you cross me I'll kill you and pay for you, as much as it meant anything else. Because the idea of going to jail didn't scare him at all, and the idea of getting lynch-mobbed didn't faze him either. All I can remember him ever saying about that was: If they shoot me they sure better not miss me they sure better get me that first time. Whitefolks used to say he was a crazy nigger, but what they really meant or should have meant was that he was confusing to them. Because if they knew him well enough to call him crazy they also had to know enough about him to realize that he wasn't foolhardy, or even careless . . . Somehow or other it was as if they respected him precisely because he didn't seem to care anything about them one way or the other. They certainly respected the fact that he wasn't going to take any foolishness off of them. (13)

Luzana is truly Hemingwayan in this sense: he avoids self-pity and acts in accordance to counterstament; he is the repetition (with a signal difference) of a Jake Barnes, the leading character of *The Sun Also Rises*, which is to say that he in a way is signifying on Hemingway's model. Triumph is not even a matter of refuting discrimination, but of not even letting it take its ground in the first place. This does not make Murray or Hemingway's characters insensitive or hard-boiled. Murray makes the following observation of Jake Barnes: "Jake does not go around begging for sympathy, like Robert Cohn, but lies awake at night thinking about himself and CRIES!" (1996: 190). There is something about Luzana Cholly that resembles this conduct, yet remains inaccessible to the reader since Scooter is left to wonder about the intimate details of his hero's life. For example, Luzana refuses to speak about his service in the front to the boys. Perhaps this is because he believes they are too young, or perhaps because underneath the surfacing tough appearance, it is not something that he wants to be admired for. Scooter and Little Buddy Marshall have to get all the information about Luzana in the war from another veteran, Soldier Boy Crawford. In some way Luzana does not believe that he is worth imitating, in other words, he does not conceive of himself as a hero, but merely tries to make the best out of life.

Luzana becomes the initiator of rituals for Scooter; he is the one who embarks the young boy on a task that will forever serve as guidance in his life. As soon as Scooter takes a serious step in his emulation, Luzana becomes a father-like authority figure and immerses the boy in the lessons of life. One must go through a series of steps

in order to be able to affirm life; it is an experiential process that must be developed through a series of tasks. At a certain point, Scooter and Little Buddy Marshall decide to run off with Luzana and share his adventures throughout the country. They hop on one of the L&N train boxcars and suddenly see Luzana, who until now was oblivious to the boys' plan. Luzana's first reaction disappoints the boys, who had eagerly anticipated becoming real-life wagon-train scouts:

> We were standing there not so much waiting as frozen then, and he just let us stay there and feel like two wet puppies shivering, their tails tucked between their legs. Then he lit his cigarette and finally said something.
>
> Oh no you don't oh no you don't neither. Because it ain't like that ain't like that ain't never been like that and ain't never going to be not if I can help it.
>
> He said that as much to himself as to us, but at the same time he was shaking his head not only as if we couldn't understand him but also as if we couldn't even hear him.
>
> Y'all know it ain't like this. I know y'all know good and well it cain't be nothing like this . . .
>
> I could have crawled into a hole. I could have sunk into a pond. I could have melted leaving only a greasy spot. I could have shriveled to nothing but ash. (27)

Luzana then takes the boys back to Gasoline Point. Scooter feels humiliated because of Luzana's overprotective behavior getting on the Northbound train back home: "He wouldn't let us hop it . . . He waited for it to slow down for the sliding and then he picked me up (as they pick you up to put you in the saddle of a pony because you're not big enough to reach the stirrups from the ground on your own)" (28). The boy realizes that his efforts to live in "legendary time" (28) are futile. Back in Gasoline Point, the three of them sit under the bridge waiting for the next train for Luzana to depart on his own. By now Luzana has calmed down and is telling the boys stories. He has taken his guitar out but he does not play it; he only strokes it. Still, his words are engraved in Scooter's mind

> As if it had been another song composed specifically for us . . . The main thing he wanted to talk about was going to school and learning to use your head. . . . He said the young generation was supposed to take what they were already born with and learn how to put it with everything the civil engineers and inventors and doctors and lawyers and bookkeepers had found out about the world and be the one to bring about the day the old folks had always been prophesizing and praying for. (29-30)

Before leaping on the train, Luzana looks down at the boys and makes his request: "Make old Luze proud of you, he said then, and he was almost pleading. Make old Luze glad to take his hat off to you some of these days. You going further than old Luze ever dreamed of. Old Luze ain't been nowhere. Old Luze don't know from nothing" (30). From then on Scooter becomes a dedicated schoolboy. He is Miss Lexine Metcalf's promising student. He develops a passion for books, maps, and any other source of knowledge that earns him a scholarship for college. The fact that in *The Seven League Boots* and *The Magic Keys* the members of The Bossman Himself's band call him „Schoolboy' is a reflection of his evolution in the right direction. It is a name that goes back to the task set by Luzana, while maintaining a similar sound to „Scooter.' The task as a literary motif is a test to prove whether the hero has actual potential or not. It is a trial of endurance, persistence, patience, skill, and aptitudes, and only those who can truly master their actions, decisions and strategies will have the power to overcome it.

What are the implications of Murray's signifying mythopoeia within the context of Afro-American literature? His conclusions deeply resemble those of Ellison, although he was fortunate enough not to suffer the same public ordeals on allegations of Uncle Tomism. Like Ellison, Murray was deeply dissatisfied not only with the sociological trend of the „Negro pathology' but with what he calls "Marx-Freud-oriented" literature in several of his works. *The Omni-Americans* and *The Hero and the Blues* can be regarded as open manifestos against this form of realist literature. The targets of his criticism are none other than Richard Wright and James Baldwin,[59]

[59] Despite the disputes inside Afro-American literary circles on how to approach the Negro situation in America, there are critics who refuse to reduce Wright's work to the limiting category of 'protest fiction' and rather defend the idea that he "saw the pen as a sword" (Gilyard 1985: 159) and deserved fair recognition from his contemporaries in his ability to express the linguistic incompetence of many black individuals as a result of the American establishment.

James Baldwin also criticized Wright in "Everybody's Protest Novel," a controversial essay included in his first non-fiction book, *Notes of a Native Son* (1955). Ironically, Baldwin criticizes Bigger Thomas, the protagonist of *Native Son*, for the very same reasons that Murray attacks both of their works: "Bigger's tragedy is not that he is cold, or black or hungry," Baldwin writes, "but that he has accepted a theology that denies him life, that he admits the possibility of his being sub-human and feels constrained, therefore, to battle for his humanity according to those brutal criteria bequeathed him at his birth" (1994: 23). In *The Omni-Americans*, Murray would claim that for all his accurate insight on Wright, Baldwin did not practice what he had preached, and fell victim to the same narrative strategies:

authors which he charges with the failure of providing blues-idiomatic, and hence an epic framework that humanizes black American culture. These writers contribute as much to the contagiousness of the black deviation folklore (or black pathology "fakelore") as any white social science theorist in the line of Gunnar Myrdal. Rather than examining the material available in the vernacular and black oral tools such as signifying, these writers construct their narratives using the political and psychoanalytical sciences of Marx and Freud and their followers, thus extinguishing any possibility for the vernacular to develop as an adequate tool for endurance and subsistence in the face of adversity. The exaltation of social sciences at the expense of the blues idiom disrupts the dynamics and rituals of heroism: what is conveyed is the sense that the black individual *does* deem himself as inferior, and that he cannot endure and subsist without whatever scraps of benevolence white supremacy concedes. As opposed to regarding one's potential as heroic, and as opposed to developing the courage necessary to confront the dragon, the individual indulges in "the blues as such," and passively allows himself to become a helpless victim:

> Many Marx-Freud melodramas are specifically designed to demonstrate that the „system,' the environment in a social structure, will destroy all mankind if it is not transformed. In any event, it is always the so-called system (political and economic habitat) which generates the complications in the social science plot structure. Thus since the successful social science fiction hero achieves his end (or at least saves his skin) because he is able to outwit or beat the system, the one who fails does so only because he is deficient in scientific technique (and moral purpose, to be sure). As defined not only by Marxians and Freudians, but also by social reformers in general, all of the essential problems of humanity can either be solved or reduced to insignificance by a hero or man of good will who can apply adequate scientific insight to Public Administration and medicine. (Murray 1995: 17)

To reduce literary characters to thoughts and actions that can only be explained and resolved through social sciences is to deny the fundamental problem of the human being, to deny that whatever the political structure may be, and whatever the

---

"He has relied more and more on the abstract categories of social research and less and less on the poetic insights of the creative artist," Murray professes. "So much so that the very characteristics of protest fiction which he once deplored in the work Harriet Beecher Stowe and Richard Wright now seem to be his stock and trade" (Murray 1990: 148).

psychoanalytic trends may demand (which are but a misguidance from the essentialism of human nature), the individual will always have to face chaos and nature in the raw. This is where he ought to channel all his actions and emotions and where he should acknowledge his responsibility as a character or as a writer. Not once does Scooter blame the system (which does not mean that he is oblivious to injustice and racism); he knows that the only way to beat it will be through an assertive mode of action. Nor does he describe the violent and potentially traumatic episodes of his life in a victimizing tone.

Hence the image of the hero-versus-dragon is lost in the Marx-Freud social science fiction, portraying instead a series of philanthropic values that have little to do with the epic or with the dynamics of antagonistic cooperation. In social science fiction, the dragon succeeds by creating such a confusing atmosphere that the protagonist cannot possibly know from where true threat emanates. In the analysis of Luzana Cholly we saw a quote in which Scooter claimed that the train-hopping guitar player was confusing to whites and that therefore they did not know what to make out of him and hence never interfered in his business. He succeeds by making the dragon's weaponry his own: the propagation of confusion. Writers of social science fiction (or protest fiction), in Murray's view, refuse to even bother to seek a hero who will come to understand what the solutions to his problems may be. What makes this even more frustrating is that protest writers are unwilling to acknowledge the fact that the system is already ready to successfully counteract the protestor's complaints:

> Over any romantic implications of shining armor the protest writer seems to prefer the humility of sackcloth and ashes. Instead of a man on horseback, it seems content to promote the man of moderation and peace – or the loud-mouthed wretch who hurls abuse at those whom he quite obviously assumes to be his betters . . . Even when the outraged protest writer threatens damnation, it is easy for anybody to see that he is mostly only bluffing and that the real threat is on the confusion being propagated. . . . Most Northern-style U.S. dragons are not at all unmindful of how easy it is to get some of the loudest protestors to settle for a few compassionate reassurances that someone is beginning to Give a Damn. (Murray 1995: 47)

The dragons are prepared to deal with people who show remonstration against their action. The measures adopted to console and reassure the protestor of their righteous intentions thus become mere policies that puzzle the individual. As one of many

examples, Murray alludes to the politically-correct linguistic codes of euphemisms and circumlocutions that the protestor deems as progressive for the black race, but that continue to signify on the same racist "fakelore": "[Northerners] say ghetto instead of niggertown. They say minority group meaning subspecies not only of citizens but of mankind. They say culturally deprived meaning uncivilized" (Murray 1991: 76). Of course Murray is not claiming that the situation in the North is not better in terms of citizenship and coexistence with the white race than it is in the South; he is only stating to be wary of certain euphemisms that once more confuse the individual, restricting him from seeing beyond the veil of the monster's mask. In his view, Wright and Baldwin spread the notion that black culture is indeed helpless without the allowances made by white supremacy:

> In effect, protest or finger-pointing fiction such as *Uncle Tom's Children* and *Native Son* addresses itself to the humanity of the dragon in the very process of depicting him as a fire-snorting monster: "Shame on you, Sir Dragon," it says in effect, "be a nice man and a good citizen." (Or is it, "Have mercy, Massa?") Indeed, in their fiction no less than in their essays, writers like Richard Wright, James Baldwin and their imitators often seem to be appealing to the *godliness* of the dragon: "O, you who are so powerful, let my people go." (Murray 1995: 45)

All of Murray's notions of rituals, emulation, counterstament, artistic action (extension, elaboration and refinement), and epic images are lost in the Marx-Freud social science fiction parameter. Nor would this temperament of protest fiction characters fit into the novels of Hemingway: Robert Cohn, the wailing poor-excuse-of-a-man opposite to Jake Barnes in *The Sun Also Rises* incarnates the weakness and self-indulgence in being a victim. Jake Barnes, Nick Adams and Scooter and Luzana, on the other hand, are all oriented towards confronting the facts of life, and this is what makes them blues-idiomatic archetypes.

3.6. CONCLUSION

Viewed as a mythographic approach and a mythopoeic device, signifying, as a rhetoric underlying a literary theory, can be utilized as a form of counterstatement to negative myths and racial stereotypes pertaining to jazz and the blues. Furthermore, it allows the writer to exalt the vernacular values of African American culture and proclaim more affirmative, democratic ways through which to regard the black literary tradition in America.

Through the work of Alice Walker, the blues idiom emerges as an instrument through which to melt or reinvent the hierarchical differences governing the up-down system of sexual antinomies. By way of Shug Avery, the blues appeals to the conception of a Pan-African aesthetic tradition, at the same time that it provides hints of the possibility of a new world order where sexual and racial oppression no longer reign. Shug and the womanist philosophy she voices exemplify a model for black female autonomy, a new social structure based on the linguistic freedom (as opposed to the silenced existence) of women. The sexual physicality so prevalent in the classical blues discourse no longer points to the alleged promiscuity of black women, but to the proclamation of their sexual (and by extension, spiritual) autonomy and agency. Similarly, womanism contravenes the hyper-heterosexual male prowess that often accompanies jazz music, and opens up to the spiritual and sexual connections between women, whether in the form of sisterhood or lesbianism. Shug presents binarisms and either fuses them or strips from them their male-centered connotations. Like Esu, she represents the possibility of doubleness within singlehood, which taken to the cosmogonic order, is revealed through commitment to the „It' God. Like the classical blues tradition of which she is a part of, her sassyness and spunk represent a pragmatic impulse to satirize and mock the hardships and tribulations that come with the facts of life.

In the case of Ralph Ellison and Albert Murray, Signifyin(g) Theory has been regarded as a means through which to conceive the literary tradition in a way that mirrors the mythical method and Eliot's and Malraux's sense of tradition. Signifying has furthermore been viewed as a black vernacular method constituting the individual's "equipment for living" in dealing with nature-in-the-raw. The blues idiom, according to Ellison, epitomizes the contestation between the tragic and the comic forces of human

existence, at the same time that it eternalizes the attitudes and strategic methods that have shaped the American and the European literary canons. As a modern incarnation of the Elizabethan buffoon, Armstrong parodies and exposes the farce of racism ruling over America while simultaneously extending and refining the type of humor that has, through minstrelsy, characterized the nation's comic thriving in its short history. Murray picks up on Ellison's contention of signifying to deconstruct the blues idiom as an aesthetic of epic proportions, where mythic confrontations between hero and dragon are systematically ritualized in the contestation between direct and indirect statement (the lyrics and the way they are performed and signified upon by the accompanying instrumentation and dancing).

Contrary to how Gates would have it, however (for he sought to describe the matrix interrelating solely African American texts, so as to present an independent model of the tradition), I have used Signifyin(g) Theory as a mythopoeic vehicle through which to establish the parallels with those writers and theorists which were embraced by Ellison and Murray and which, coincidentally, are white. I use the term „œcoincidentally' here not without some difficulties; what I mean is that very few black writers (if none at all) were dedicated to the development of an epic in the line of what Ellison and Murray believed contemporary racial politics demanded. Much less were they interested in exploiting the blues idiom's potential as a metaphor of the universal dynamics of heroism or as a tool to reinstate the highly individualistic, frontiersman-like character of the American archetype. That Ellison and Murray refused to embrace the writing of Wright, Baldwin, or Baraka, among others, should not be understood as a rejection of a black American literary tradition, but as an open advocacy of generating one. What they ask, mainly, is that the vernacular elements available to the writer be reconsidered and reinterpreted because it is there where the human and aesthetic depth of black culture can be found. Only in this way can an African American literary tradition step away from the shadow of white hegemony. Protest (or social science-oriented writing) develops and evolves only because it is reactionary; there is nothing creative about the model it endorses because its heroic archetypes have been deprived from their humanity by the very same authors that conceived them. If black literature is to find its independence, in other words, it must be through the stylization of the vernacular tools that allow the characters to become more than puppets battered by white supremacy. In Ellison's and Murray's views, those mythical and ritual models

had only been projected in the work of the white writers they called their ancestors or main influences. Contary to what many of Ellison's most ardent critics believed, their defense of these models is never done at the expense of the vernacular or of black rituals; rather, the vernacular and rituals are used and celebrated precisely because they appeal to the human condition in a racially-stylized way. Behind the aesthetic integration of the vernacular within the universal (and the universal within the vernacular) lies the conviction that the human condition necessitates the harmony of a single cosmos, not the belief that white literature is superior to black. By the same token, there lies the premise that there is an overarching American tradition, one that strongly depends on African American tradition, not that the black and white American traditions are heterogeneous, antithetical structures opposing one another.

The mythopoeic trends permeating the writing of Walker, Ellison, and Murray are, therefore, contrary to the interests purported by protest or Black Arts Movement authors, of which I will continue to use Baraka as the most representative figure. Out of the three, Walker, because of her extensive background as an activist and protestor, can more readily relate to the militant tone of the black and feminist movements of the 1970s. Her womanist cause, however, profoundly distances her from the masculine dominance of Black Power just as much as her emphasis on race distances her from many of the Radical and Cultural feminist principles. Ellison and Murray, as I have so far attempted to convey, are highly sceptical of the separationist, militant tone of Black Power and find their sociological framework deficient politically and aesthetically. Perhaps a more adequate corpus for the exposition of Signifyin(g) Theory as a mythographic resource would have been the work of a Black Power writer, as they provide a model of the black tradition that is more insulated from white texts (which in Ellison's and Murray's view is but an illusion, for precisely by isolating and deeming black culture as purely reactionary, they succumb to the manipulation of white supremacy, maiming the possibilities of their own aesthetic canon). But because the last section of this dissertation aims to present today's mainstream (which is not to say the only) perception of jazz and its significance in and to America, I believe that it is necessary to address those whose vision has been responsible for the type of image professed by Wynton Marsalis, „Jazz at the Lincoln Center,' and most importantly, Ken Burns.

PART 4

MYTHISTORY AND 'GREAT MEN' IN KEN BURNS'S *JAZZ*

This section focuses on the current mythistorical approach cementing the grand narrative of the jazz canon in the highly acclaimed and controversial documentary, *Jazz*, directed by Ken Burns and written by Geoffrey C. Ward. Through these last chapters, I aim to come full circle with the key issues that I have been considering in the analyses thus far and return to focusing on the jazz canon, as it was presented in Part 1 of this study. In Part 1 I examined the process by which jazz had carved its way into the academia, up until the mergence of musicology and cultural studies through the discipline of New Jazz Studies. In the path towards crystallizing jazz as a legitimate field of research worthy of scholarly interest, I alluded to the general authorial penchant towards jazz mythography, as opposed to mythopoeia. I explained as well the complications in rigidly classifying such works as strictly mythographic: as scholars asses the mythical paradigms pertaining to the grand narrative of jazz, they promote alternative canons that in themselves cannot help but foster myth once more. Thus, one person's mythography becomes another person's mythopoeia. Sometimes,

even the scholar finds himself confronting such a contradiction in his own work, without the additional critical eye of other readers. Such was the case of *Early Jazz*, wherein Gunther Schuller's scientific, musicological method clashed with the author's own mythopoeic commentary regarding the majestic style of certain jazz geniuses that slipped from the scrutiny afforded by formal modes of measurement. Regardless of the paradoxes that insulated appreciations of mythography and mythopoeia may raise, however, I established that based on the openly-expressed authorial intention, scholars were, in general, prone towards mythography, even if the side-effect of such an enterprise was the nourishing of further mythopoeic language.

Part 2 and Part 3 have provided insight not only as to the ways by which certain works can be approached mythographically (methods which, as I indicated at the beginning of this study, the corpus itself demanded as an analytical tool), but have also delved on the issues which had been schematically presented in Part 1. Furthermore, the ideology of the writers which we have so far considered seems paramount for the reassessment of mythemes in the Ken Burns's *Jazz*: the black / white, high art / popular entertainment, male / female, master / disciple, trickster / Uncle Tomism, Monkey / Lion, and hero / victim antinomies, just to name a few, stand as essential structuring components of Burns's narrative. The documentary is sealed with the print of Ellison and Murray (who participates as a talking head), and for this reason they have been the object of the last two chapters. We now address these issues as they stand today in the jazz panorama: racial ownership, authority, authenticity, fact, truth, illusion, and their relationship to the canon. *Jazz* constitutes an exceptional site from which to evaluate the impact that each of these matters has not only because it deals head-on with the basic jazz mythemes, but also because of the effects it had in the academia as much as in popular culture. Unlike in Part 2 and Part 3, it is essential to bear in mind that we are no longer dealing with journalism, essays or fiction, but with the storytelling of history, that is, historiography. Historiography brings these mythemes to a new level, and as such, takes on a new set of responsibilities.

In terms of the structure of this final section, I would like to add that contrary to the explicative notes given about the compatibility between jazz and Barthean mystificantion and jazz and the blues idiom and Signifyin(g) Theory, mythistory and the Great Man Theory do not, I believe, require a justification of the sort. Because in Part 1 I already described the canon's reliance on ‚great men,' and because mythistory, as a

discipline, can touch on any topic or theme that has had some form of historical development, to consider the consistency between jazz and mythistory would be repetitive and unnecessary. An overview of the fundamental principles of a mythistorical approach will, I believe, suffice as a triggering reminder of the basic ideas regarding the Great Man Theory that were presented in Part 1 and to validate the discipline's credentials as an excelling method through which to approach jazz history and historiography.

4.1. MYTHISTORY AND THE HISTORIAN: AN OVERVIEW

The narrow conjunction binding myth and history is one that has troubled historiographers on the grounds of such complex fields as epistemology and hermeneutics. What purposes myth serves in the making of historiography is a concern that historians typically trace as far back as to the authorial intent of Herodotus and Thucydides. While the former's convictions were based on the indispensability of mythic narratives and hearsay for the consolidation and justification of national sentiment, the latter aimed to dispense myth from its relevancy in the historiographic arts. According to Joseph Mali, for Herodotus, "the task for the historian is not to eliminate but to illuminate historical myth" (2003: 1), and as such he crafted *The Histories.*[60] He was aware that to weave the epic actions and accomplishments of heroes and gods into his narrative would distance his account from fact, yet they constituted the truth upon which his readers lived by. "Herodotus seems to have realized that even though these memories and tales were not proper histories of the nation, they must be preserved for, and in, their histories for further inquiries into their origins and destinies" (2003: 1), Mali writes. On the opposite stands Thucydides, the „father of scientific history' and author of *The History of the Peloponnesian War* and for whom "the „mythic' signified any story that could not be tested or inquired about, either because it had occurred in too distant times or because it contained too many fantasies" (Mali 2003: 2). The stark contrast between Herodotus's more virtual construction of history and Thucydides's more empirical method exposes the intricacies involved in the contemplation of the relationship between myth and history. Inevitably, the matter of reliability becomes central to historiography, in a way that stretches beyond the consideration of the author. It is no longer solely a question of whether the writer can be

[60] Comprised of nine books as a dedication to the nine muses (Clio, Euterpé, Thalia, Melpomene, Terpsichore, Erato, Polymnia, Urania, Calliopé), *The Histories* follows the dynasties of four Persian kings (Cyrus, Cambyses, Darius, and Xerxes) from approximately 557 BC to 479 BC. It is estimated that Herodotus wrote and published his masterpiece from the 450s BC to the 420s BC. The First Book (Clio), opens with a commentary that has been regarded by historians (including Mali) as the primal articulation of the psychological willingness to accept myth as historical record: the researches are published "in order that the actions of men may not be effaced by time, nor the great and wondrous deeds displayed by both Greeks and barbarians deprived of renown" (Herodotus 2005: 1).

regarded as reliable or not but whether his sources can. What constitutes a realiable source? How can realiability be measured? These issues pour back to the similar discussion we engaged in through the writing of Carl Van Vechten: how are we to judge authority? Is authority proportional to the writer's (or source's) sincerity? Does his or her legitimacy depend on the authenticity of his material? How are we to measure authenticity? Should we base authenticity on the grounds of fact or truth?

Though a neologism, „mythistory' has, therefore, been an affair which historians have always had to confront in their craft. For the most part, it appears that historians have placed their faith in Thucydides's approach, although Mali identifies a number of great historians that complied with Herodotus's approach to historiography in their own epochs: Giambattista Vico, Jacob Burckhardt, Aby Warburg, Ernst Kantorowicz, and, "in his own critical and dialectic way" (Mali 2003: 32), Walter Benjamin. In the late twentieth century, however, the academic ramification of the humanities into disciplines such as cultural, feminist, and ecological (versus natural) history, to name a few, has conceded an unprecedented space for myth to regenerate and develop. The aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement in the Western world was the motor behind much-needed research and revision on ethnic and (sub)cultural groups seeking to consolidate their collective memories and identities.

To offer a basic definition, mythistory is a historiographic approach whereupon a certain nation's or culture's myths are penned as being true, as having taken place at some point, indeterminate as that point in time may be (for such is the elusiveness of mythical time). Traditionally, in the field of historiography, the concept of myth, aside from designating a narration (usually of a foundational nature) that "explain[s] the present in terms of some momentuous event that occurred in the past" (Mali 2003: 4), is intrinsically bound to its connotations of „falsity,' „fantasy,' and „illusion.'[61] Adherence to these connotations simplifies the assignment of the historian who resents mythic germination in his text. "For these historians, historical myths are just a means to masquerade, under the false pretenses of communal unity and continuity, real socio-political tensions and conflicts and historical ruptures" (Mali 2003: 7). Any account open to myth, therefore, deviates from scientific method and the quest for fact and truth.

However, authorial devotion to the scientific method fractures the narratology of history; moreover, such an approach cannot help but remain a quixotic gesture.

[61] See item 1.4. for a review of the original meaning of 'myth' and its connotations.

Assessing the historian's task of balancing truth, myth, and the aspirations to a universal truth, William McNeill contends that:

> All truths are general. All truths abstract from the available assortment of data simply by using words, which in their very nature generalize so as to bring order to the incessantly fluctuating flow of messages in and messages out that constitutes human consciousness. Total reproduction of experience is impossible and undesirable. It would merely perpetuate the confusion we seek to escape. Historiography that aspires to get closer and closer to the documents – all the documents and nothing but the documents – is merely moving closer and closer to incoherence, chaos, and meaninglessness. That is a dead end for sure. No society will long support a profession that produces arcane trivia and calls it truth. (1986: 18)[62]

In the line of what Kenneth Burke had described as the inescapability of a "terministic screen" (1966), McNeill argues that since it is every historian's indelible obligation to delineate a pattern through careful selection of fragments, the effect is inevitably one of varying degrees of deformation. Cohesion and coherence in the pattern, the providing of a sense of beginning (creation myth) and an eschatological purpose (myth of deliverance), soars above the nihilism inhabiting the depths of scientific precision. The mythistorian's assumption is that the denial and exclusion of myth cannot possibly provide any sense of social or existential order. The input that the historian receives must follow an arrangement beyond that of a mere catalogue if facts are to lose their trivial nature. To give meaning and coherence to the facts is to make them intelligible, and to make them intelligible is not only to make them credible, but more importantly, to obey to some sense of process (of which progress appears a most preferential form). Selection cannot, therefore, be dispensed with by the historian: "Only some facts matter for any given pattern," McNeill states. "Otherwise useless clutter will obscure what we are after: perceptible relationships among important facts. That and that alone constitutes an intelligible pattern, giving meaning to the world" (1986: 5-6). Only by

[62] McNeill's hints echo Nietzsche's apocalyptic lyricism of the doomsday of man in *The Birth of Tragedy*:

> And now the man bereft of myth stands eternally starving among all the past ages and digs and rummages in search of roots, even in the most remote of the ancient worlds. What does the tremendous historical need of this dissatisfied modern culture, the collection of countless other cultures, the consuming desire for knowledge point to, if not to the loss of myth, to the loss of the mythic home, of the mythic maternal womb? (2000: 123)

composing a pattern can the past be of social use for the present and for the future. What is inferred is that despite attempts to reject mythical narrations in historiography, the obligation towards pattern-development inevitably induces mythic connotations. As Peter Heehs claims, "what we call history is at best mythistory" (1994: 1). "Despite the contemporary tendency to regard history as meaningless on the one hand, and positivist efforts to efface everything mythical from the record on the other," he argues, "people will continue to seek meaning in history, and will continue to develop myths to help them in this effort" (Heehs 1994: 19).

In a way, the dispute between „logos' and „mythos,' is parallel to that between the contesting forces of mythography and mythopoeia. Though the basis may not be the search for fact or truth, mythography, much like the sort of historiography which attempts to divest itself from myth as much as possible, reaches out to the more specific, scientific methods. A mythistory, on the other hand, is by its very nature mythopoeic, and thus aims to eternalize the values that solidify a given culture's sense of collective identity. In Part 1 I mentioned the overlapping of mythography and mythistory, how one writer's mythography becomes another's mythopoeia. If we recall the case with Gunther Schuller's *Early Jazz*, we find the parallels between the task of the historian and that of the musicologist. Despite the fact that Schuller applied as scientific a musicological technique as possible (a technique which is open to the exactness of measurement, unlike the less precise „truths' that constitute the historian's immediate material), he could not help fall prey to the necessities imposed by myth.

Accepting the premise that every history is, to some extent, mythistorical, does not redeem the critic from assessing the narrative's balance of truth, fact, and myth. "Some [mythistories] clearly are more adequate to the facts than others. Some embrace more time and space and make sense of a wider variety of human behavior than others. And some, undoubtedly, offer a less treacherous basis for collective action than others" (1986: 19), says McNeill. Conviction in the fact that myth only indicates „falsity' and „fantasy' would render it easy enough for anybody to sustain that in all professional attempts at historiography, history visibly outweighs myth, even if the text readily accedes to a mythistorical approach. Indeed, the work of a historian would be unprofessional if he were to rely on falsity more or as much as on fact. But since both myth and history are areas subjected to hermeneutics, mythistorians argue that to contemplate myth as mere phallacy and distortion is not only reductive, but distances

the historian from the ideal of truth. It has been the weakness of many historians to make a tautological connection between fact and truth, and it has been their weakness as well to assume that fact is a channel towards truth. Although McNeill does not allude to the relevancy of this point, I believe it is necessary to build a case for mythistory as a sound form of historiography. Fact generally falls under the domain of science and empirism; truth tends to fall under the province of philosophy and the arts. Fact concentrically aims towards the irreductible specificity; truth concentrically stretches towards ecumenical significance. The historian's search for the "meaning of the world" (McNeill 1986: 6) is a task that must be nurtured by epiphanic truths of as universal a scope as possible; facts can become useful tools through which to rationalize that truth, mold a cosmos out of chaos. History provides fact and exegesis of history provides truth. But myth, for all its dennoting and connoting of falsities and fantasies, also offers truth, a truth with more ecumenical potential than history. Not only is myth true insofar as that its content is deemed as having happened by the culture at hand, but furthermore, it is true in that it shapes the very sense of identity and collective memory of that culture. In Mali's words, "myths not only are needed to form a national identity, but they also pass into that identity itself" (2003: 6). In order to fully comprehend that identity, the historian must accept myth as part of his corpus material and be open to the truth hidden within it; he must "accept certain common stories that might be „wrong' . . . as „true,' that is, as effective insofar as they are affective" (Mali 2003: 6). The ideal that mythistorians have aspired towards in the balancing of truth, fact and myth, is explained by Mali:

> On their premises, modern historiography must deal not only with what actually happened (that is, in common terms, history), nor with what people merely imagine to have actually happened (myth), but rather with the process in which both affect the production and reproduction of historical meaning (mythistory). (2003: 27)

Mythistory, therefore, has direct implications in the approach and attitude of the historian when confronting his work. A historian becomes a mythistorian when he accepts and transmits the premise that above the significance of what myth is, stands what myth does. Only in this way can myth reveal itself as the force of agency that it is; only then can it prove its subsistence through the ages and expose its role in public

service. In other words, only then, according to the mythistorian, can we come closer to getting a glimpse of the actual meaning, the truth, woven into the fabrics of history.

Thus mythistory points to the type of attitudinal involvement of the historian (whereupon he regards certain responsibilities as his own) and to a final textual product that is inclusive of mythic truth (for it is affectively lived by the culture at hand). Beyond these issues, mythistory as a discipline becomes less restrictive. There is no structural requirement for a mythistory to adhere to, though there are a few frameworks which have proved more popular than others. Mali considers the historiographical application of Eliot's mythical method to be characteristically mythistorical. Burkhardt's advocacy of history as a source of mystery and poetry to be accessed through the contemplation of images of the eternal (*Anschauung*) was also mythistorical. The common thread lies in that by acknowledging myth, history becomes a process of *Bildung.* In establishing Burckhardt as the father of mythistory in the modern age, Mali claims that his originality marked a stark contrast with the approach used by Leopold von Ranke, hence cyclically returning to the breach between Herodotus and Thucydides:

> Whereas Ranke believed that history was (or at least had to be) a system of *Wissenchaft*, a science based on factual sources and laws, Burckhardt saw history as primarily a process of *Bildung*. As the term implies, *Bildung* grows out of *das Bild*: in the German tradition, it was generally conceived as education through instruction in the classical tradition, literally by emulation (*Nachbildung*) of a concrete archetypal model (*Vorbild*) from its lore of figures and cases. *Bildung*, in other words, consists in the transmission of *Bilder*, mythological images, in the cultural tradition of any nation and civilization. (2003: 14)

I propose to consider the Great Man Theory as a form of mythistory for its concordance with its key conditions. The Great Man Theory complies with the reliability of myth as a valid source of truth, understands and characterizes history as a process of *Bildung*, and bestows upon the historian the responsibility to perpetuate an agreement between myth and history. In Part 1 I already described some of the main features of the Great Man Theory and its relevance within the development of jazz criticism and jazz historiography. The Great Man Theory, let us recall, has in recent research on jazz and myth (most notably in Tony Whyton's *Jazz Icons*) become a strategical target in the battle towards the deconstruction of the canon. Because Whyton

and a number of other scholars, which I will as well consider in the following chapter, have already analyzed the intricacies of the Great Man Theory operating in Burns's documentary, I shall only attend to its dynamics for further commentary on the film's mythistorical method. However, let us first briefly consider its main characteristics so as to better grasp the complextity of its implications.

The Great Man Theory is a conception of history as a sequential process between the actions and deeds of ‚great men,' who are granted a heroic status. These ‚great men' bring forth an original message in the form of some type of accomplishment (whether it be aesthetic, scientific, political, philanthropic, or in the art of war); they are the most perfected personification of the powers and virtues of nature, and as such they bear the epic proportions of a deity. They are geniuses, demiurges before which the world was one way and after which the world was different. They absorb the messages delivered by previous ‚great men' and they build upon them, making an entire epoch their own. Much like the notion of tradition permeating the work of Eliot, Malraux, Ellison, and Murray, the ´great men' extend, elaborate and refine (or signify upon) the totality of the world into which they have been born. Contrary to the mythical method's exaltation of the work of art above the creator (the "mind of Europe," let us recall, for Eliot, soars over the "private mind" of the author), however, the Great Man Theory has euhemeristic aspirations. The Great Man Theory is to a certain extent built on the belief that from the worship of such charismatic individuals developed the veneration of religious and mythical figures. The heroes, in other words, are deified: versus the platonic transfusion of the divine into the natural, emerges the notion that nature is the architect of the divine.

The origin of the theory is usually attributed to Thomas Carlyle's *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and The Heroic in History* (1841). The book propounded the premise that "the History of the world is but the Biography of great men" (Carlyle 2007: 21). Through a series of monographs, Carlyle illustrates possible forms of the ‚great man' incarnate in accordance with the demands of the ages: the hero as divinity (Odin), the hero as prophet (Mahomet), the hero as poet (Dante and Shakespeare), the hero as priest (Martin Luther and John Knox), the hero as man of letters (Samuel Johnson, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Robert Burns) and the hero as ‚king' (Cromwell and Napoleon). Society, Carlyle argued, is structured as a "Heroarchy" (2007: 10), and the limitless admiration of the ‚great man' makes the ordinary man (and by extension, the masses)

nobler. Although pagan mythologies are more euhemeristic, Carlyle also readily acceded to (and was in fact more biased by) platonic possibilities, whereupon the „great man' is the anointed one, the messiah chosen by God to deliver His Word. Tinges of euhemerism are still maintained, for the hero, although limited physically by nature, is an instrument of the divine. In such a way does the hero perceive the material world before him: "To his eyes it is forever clear that this world wholly is miraculous"; the hero, a great thinker, can easily perceive "that this so solid-looking material world is, at bottom, in very deed, Nothing; is a visual and factual Manifestation of God's power and presence, – a shadow hung out by Him on the bosom of the void Infinite; nothing more" (Carlyle 2007: 45).

The „great man' is an agent in the transmission and perpetuation of his truth, which he regards, because of his euhemeristic qualities, as fact. In the same way that the mythistorian labors on the revelation of mythical and historical truth, in this sense so does the hero consecrate what truth he holds within, and his mission becomes one of spreading the message to fellow men. Individuality is not lost, however (for if such were the case, the heroes could hardly be regarded for their charisma); rather, personality becomes a filter, hence proving that the „great man,' although an instrument of the divine, is not passive: "The earnest man, speaking to his brother men, must have always stated what seemed to him a *fact*, a real Appearance of Nature." Nonetheless, "the way in which such Appearance or fact shaped itself, – what sort of *fact* it became for him, – was and is modified by his own laws of thinking; deep, subtle, but universal, ever-operating laws" (Carlyle 2007: 19).

Carlyle was contemptuous of the fact that in his time, the admiration of „great men' was at a deep slumber:

> I am well aware that in these days Hero-worship, the thing I call Hero-worship, professes to have gone out, and finally ceased. This, for reasons which it will be worth while some time to inquire into, is an age that as it were denies the existence of great men; denies the desirableness of great men. Show our critics a great man, a Luther for example, they begin to call „account' for him; not to worship him, but take the dimensions of him, – and bring him to be a little kind of man! He was "the creature of Time," they say; the Time called him forth, the Time did everything, he nothing – but what we the little critic could have done too! This seems to me but melancholy work. The Time call forth? Alas, we have known Times *call* loudly enough for their great man; but not find them when they called! He was not there; Providence had not sent him; the Time, *calling* its loudest,

> had to go down to confusion and wreck because he would not come when called. (2007: 11)

The complaint echoes the endeavor of the mythistorian. A discipline that disregards the profound impact of myth in the affective and social structure of the public at large has no consoling order to offer in its place. In the same way that those who advocate that the hero is but "the creature of time" rely only on what tools empirical sciences can provide, so does the historian who shies from myth embrace that truth can only be reached through the facts held within the documents. Carlyle's image of "confusion and wreck" is parallel to McNeill's sense of "incoherence, chaos, and meaninglessness."

In these final chapters we shall attend to Burns's application of the principles of mythistory and the Great Man Theory and to the impact such an approach has had on the jazz canon and academia. My interest lies not on exposing what statements, anecdotes or remarks may be factual; as I indicated in Part 1, the separation between fact and many of the myths peppering the documentary has recently been masterfully accomplished by Randall Sandke (2010). Rather, I am interested in analyzing the type of visual and aubible rhetoric through which *Jazz* constructs its mythistory. By contemplating its syntactic format, we can evaluate the manner by which modern mythistory and modern mythopoeia operate. Such a method will also allow us to approach Burns's own role and responsibilities as a documentary film maker, his selection and choices in the development of a unique pattern. By assessing his authorial intent as a mythistorian, his selection of other authority figures, and his and their sense of authentic jazz music, we may better come to the understanding of how mythopoeia and the Great Man Theory, contrary to Carlyle's predicament, remain a highly vivid and effective, though extremely controversial, form of historiography.

4.2. MODERN MYTHISTORY: THE USE OF ANECDOTES IN *JAZZ*

Polemical from the start, Ken Burn's *Jazz* has received critical attention from scholars who, for the most part, have been displeased with the film's content and historiographic pattern as much as with its central themes and often enough with the narratological developments. After six years in the making, the documentary began airing in PBS in 2001, and for four weeks viewers tuned in to the ten-episode, nineteen-hour long project, the longest and most ambitious of Burns's works.[63] While the average viewer may have been pleased with the epic proportions of the narrative as much as with its transparent entertainment value, academics (and not to mention a notable number of musicians and critics) generally expressed either mixed feelings or plain discontent with the overall representation of jazz. Cornell University Professor Steven F. Pond (2003) performed a highly meticulous task in the gathering and assessment of the reception of the series as expressed through different mediums. By addressing the data available in academic publications, Internet websites, blogs, forums and electronic versions of acknowledged periodicals such as the *New York Times*, he was able to number and classify what appeared to be the audiences' most salient concerns about the documentary. In wider terms, he categorized these issues within the following statements, specifying along the way the extreme pro and con reactions:

> (1) the problem of obscuring the music by talking over it or playing clips instead of whole pieces – whether this technique moves the film along or does violence to performances as complete works of art; (2) the short shrift given to the past forty years in the final episode of the series – whether it does or does not trivialize important historical moments; (3) the omission or underemphasis of several key players – it does or does not unfairly omit great jazz figures; (4) the portrayal of music history as social history – it does or does not fixate on race relations; and (5) Burns's construction of jazz as „American music,' an issue closely related to, if not inseparable from, Wynton Marsalis's prominence in the project. (Pond 2003: 30)

[63] For this section I use the DVD material that was edited by Burns and marketed and distributed in Europe. Rather than following the ten-episode structure, the collection is divided into twelve episodes and has a total duration of twelve hours (plus an extra on Burns's films titled *America, America*).

Pond is extremely accurate in his remarks. *Jazz* chronologically follows the development of the music from its roots in the last years of nineteenth-century New Orleans to the present in an evidently assymetrical arrangement. While about three episodes indulge in the Swing Era, for instance, the last episode unmercifully condenses jazz from 1960 to 2000. The overall theme is American history and American culture, providing little commentary that may illustrate the musical and musicological shifts and innovations that pushed the aesthetic into new forms and new schools. Burns's choice in authorial figures participating as talking heads invites criticism: among the almost seventy-five interviews conducted for research figure a prominent number of writers and critics. Although the amount of musicians is not a negligible number, it drastically pales in comparison to the overwhelming quantity of writers. The chief authority is indisputably Wynton Marsalis, whose views on jazz eloquently echo those of Stanley Crouch and Albert Murray, who figure as well as recurring talking heads. Through these three spokesmen, Ralph Ellison himself is granted a strong presence: excerpts of his essays, read by Samuel L. Jackson, pepper some of the episodes, and his notion of jazz as an aesthetic battling and stylizing chaos is mouthed by Murray in the documentary's portrayal of Ornette Coleman.

Adding to this is the fact that the racial issue emerges throughout as the engine behind the evolution towards new sounds as much as the prevalent explanation to a musician's charisma or self-destructive habits. The black / white antinomy is weaved throughout the narrative into other powerful binary structures such as high art / entertainment, American / European traditions, and democracy / fascism. Finally, Burns's selection of musicians as subject matter has bothered countless academics, critics, and musicians. Clearly biased by Marsalis, Murray and Crouch (and potentially Ellison), Burns's deep focus on Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington from beginning to end overshadows the merits of dozens of other musicians who have earned their right as „great men' in jazz history. Lee B. Brown points race as one of the dividing lines in the elaboration of the pattern. In his view, not only are "some legendary figures . . . resurrected unconvincingly," but also "white figures are too often either ignored or treated as alienated outsiders" (2002: 158). Interestingly enough, and as Pond points out further in his essay, while the content of the pattern is often battered and judged, the historiographical dynamics concomitant to such a pattern are rarely called into question. Referring to the overall response commentary to the film, Pond states that "rarely do

these various writers question *whether* the Great Men narrative is the proper one; the only disagreement seems to be about who has been left out of the pantheon" (2003: 35).

I begin this section with a summary of Pond's study on the reception of *Jazz* to provide the reader with a schematic knowledge on some of the issues explaining the controversy surrounding the film, and to provide him or her with the basic tools from which we shall be considering Burns's mythistorical approach to jazz historiography. The same matters of authority and authenticity continue to arise in the consideration of jazz at the turn of the century. I shall later return to the film's reception to address the jazz canon and to consider Burns's responsibility as a film maker, but for now I shall focus on the historiographical pattern itself, from the mythistorical to the Great Man Theory. I aim to analyze *Jazz* has a modern mythistorical narrative by centering the discussion around anecdotes as a valid historiographical form of developing a jazz history. In 1990, Bill Crow's *Jazz Anecdotes* collected thematically-based incidents and stories that colorfully illustrated the greatest of jazz epochs and musicians, reflecting the privileged spot anecdotes occupied in the social sphere of jazz. More recently, Tony Whyton (2010), whom I discussed in the first part of this study, has approached the jazz anecdote to study its romanticizing and mystifying powers and its relevance within jazz histories. My objective is to examine the manner by which anecdotes shape the Great Man Theory and, by extension the mythistorical framework in Burns's film. Through a series of case studies within the documentary, we may better comprehend how mythistory has adapted itself to modern culture and modern narrative demands whilst we expose the manners through which it attempts to retain its distinctive features: the sense of *Bildung* and the provision of truth.

4.2.1. Anecdotes as Mythistorical Features

In depicting the process by which democracy sustains the tone and the syntax of *Jazz*, Theodore Gracyk identifies two forms of historiography:

> There is a standing distinction between two types of history: chronology and narrative. A chronology traces a temporal succession, and *Jazz* would be notable for its scope and insight even if it were merely a string of chronologies. A narrative is more ambitious than a chronology. Burns and

> Ward construct a narrative. They need a genuine narrative to support their strong thesis of jazz as America's greatest cultural achievement in a sense that does not make it mere happenstance that jazz is an American art and that it is music of considerable aesthetic merit. (2002: 175)

Gracyk goes on to establish the differences between chronology and narrative. A chronology "satisfies itself with a chain of sufficient causes," while a narrative history "assumes both teleology and closure: the story moves toward a goal, and events are included in the narrative because they are instrumental in progress toward the goal or because they complicate that progress and must be overcome before the goal can be realized" (2002: 176). Although the notion of mythistory is absent, Gracyk's distinction resembles some of the ideals purported in the original separation between Herodotus and Thucydides. A recording and reproduction of facts through accuracy and documentation is, in Gracyk's view as much as in Thucydides's, self-nourishing and self-sufficient. Its compromise with objectivity is its only raison d'être, and follows the premise that in fact lays truth. The kind of narrative that Gracyk mentions and attributes to the documentary is one that, on the other hand, functions under some of the principles of mythistory.

It must be clarified that Gracyk never uses the term „mythistory,' nor, surprisingly enough, the term „myth' throughout his entire essay. Yet there are evident signs of resemblance between his definition of narrative and mythistory: firstly, the authorial intent is to deliver some form of truth that is fought for, and revealed, through the dynamics of the epic and heroism. By construing jazz history under this guise (or, to recall Murray's description, antagonistic cooperation) the sacred truth of the democratic ideal is revealed, which in turn crowns jazz as a high art form because of its ecumenical aspirations. Secondly, such dynamics obey the notion of history as a process towards progress. Mere linearity is no longer self-sufficient: a chronological account is indispensable for the development of any history, but chronology as an end falls short of the truth underlying history. Instead, the conception of American history as a process of *Bildung* stresses the cohesiveness of a path structured with a beginning and a movement towards an end where all dichotomies will become dissolved. Models and archetypes are imitated and extended, readapted and readjusted into modern circumstance, but with the same original goal of destroying the dragon.

What is evidently missing from the „narrative equals mythistory' equation is the inclusion of myths as part of the *Bildung* and the dynamics of antagonistic cooperation. (As I stated above, Gracyk does not treat the matter of myth within the narrative, at least not explicitly.) The consideration of *Jazz* as a mythistorical narrative is not without its complications, mainly stemming from the concept of myth itself. Herodotus, let us recall, assimilated the myths of the gods and epic tales within his history, addressing and reproducing them as if they had actually happened (that is, as if they were facts) because they were lived as such by his culture, and therefore, embedded within them there laid a glimpse to truth. Yet twenty-first-century Western historiography has no room for God as an active agent involved in the process of history: not only would the authorial figure lose his credentials but history itself has come to be accepted as a movement resulting from human and cultural processing. This does not mean that God is absent or altogether dismissed; He is simply transfigured (either in the form of credible, yet impressive attributes of „great men') or He is confined to his role as a force motivating people to follow His Word. Either way, God or gods cannot objectively function today under the same conditions as in earlier mythistories.

In order to allow mythistory to come to terms with contemporary culture, we must search for the channels that, like myths, foster some sense of truth even though their having happened is dubious (or has been hyperbolized to a great extent). In the jazz sphere, anecdotes function in a very similar way that myths once did. They are symbols, metonymies and metaphors of an underlying truth; embedded within their short plot is a narrative of ecumenical significance (whether masked by humor, tragedy, melodrama, or farce) that is lived by the participants of the jazz culture as if it were factual. The events narrated are credible enough, so the authorial source is not necessarily questioned, unless by those who are intimate with the field of jazz itself and who have had first-hand experience with either the musician appearing in the anecdote or with the time or space in which it takes place. The latter can be a tricky issue: time and space are often not specified or are characterized in a highly vaporous manner. But this often does not matter: in the same way that myths become eternal through their enactment in a mythical past, so does the jazz anecdote aspire to reach beyond a chronological and spatial axis.

Jazz anecdotes provide a sense of communal identity for the insiders of the collectivity, which, to recall Neil Leonard's semi-anthropological study, includes the

musicians, critics, aficionados, hipsters, record collectors, etc. Bill Crow, who is a bass player, opens *Jazz Anecdotes* stating that "jazz musicians are bound together by a rich and colorful history that lives in the music itself." He goes on to add that "we have stories about ourselves, stretching back to the beginnings of the music, that are told and retold; legends and laughter that remind us of who we are and where we are from" (1990: v). These participants and transmitters of anecdotes should not be deemed as gullible. If authority or aspirations to reach mythical time are unquestioned it is not necessarily because the collectivity is unable to perceive its mythical potential, but because they respect the oral tradition from which the jazz anecdote stems, and because its metaphorical or metonymical powers answer to some of the truths about jazz in more accurate ways than the documents themselves. Crow acknowledges the fact that "in this way myths are born," and warns readers that "as you read this book, bear in mind that these stories are more akin to legend than to affidavits" (1990: xi). Jazz anecdotes, moreover, push the institutionalized boundaries of historiography towards a more democratic form of making history. Transmitters are not passive propagators of tales: not only are they active agents procuring an eternalization of the anecdote, but they embellish, invent, omit, adapt, or change the mood of the anecdote in accordance to the circumstancial exigencies:

> Anecdotes, arising from an oral tradition, have their own rules. A good story will often acquire modifications and improvements as it is retold. If the teller can't remember a particular detail he needs to move the story along, he will invent one and half believe in its veracity as he invents it, because it fits the situation. Things that happen to one person will sometimes be attributed to someone else who seems a more appropriate protagonist. (Crow 1990: ix)

Not only does the oral context in which the anecdote is told filter or change the information; the authorial intent of the speaker also remains an active force. Depending on the speaker's desired effect, the function of the anecdote may also be susceptible to modification. By the same token, recipients of the anecdote may respond to the anecdote differently, and hence the story becomes ramified through subsequent propagation. "Once a good story enters the lore of the jazz world," Crow claims, "it takes on a life of its own" (1990: ix).

Whyton has done an exceptional job in recuperating and re-establishing the anecdote as a commanding element in the elaboration of the jazz culture. Accordingly, he groups anecdotes into four broad categories in the hopes of developing room for further discussion in the academic sphere: anecdote as entertainment, anecdote as appropriation, anecdote as mythology and anecdote as testimony. The four types are intimately related, and all function towards the reinforcement of some canonical structure because of their tendency to solidify the aura surrounding a given icon. Although Whyton, like Crow and Gracyk, does not explicitly refer to the notion of mythistory, he touches on several features which will be useful for the upcoming analysis. When commenting on the "anecdote as appropriation" type, he writes that, in the context of autobiographies, an anecdote "highlights how unreliable evidence can enter the jazz folklore and become more significant than fact, by creating a narrative that is both memorable and outside the ususal boundaries of criticism." Rhetoric, he asserts, "has the power to exert influence over fact, helping to promote iconic readings of the past that are appropriated and mythologized" (Whyton 2010: 115). Like Crow, Whyton emphasizes the linkage between anecdote and the oral tradition within the jazz culture, and confims the existence of a predisposition on the part of insiders to accept the malleability of fact and truth through anecdote.

Regarding "anecdote as mythology," Whyton recounts a personal experience in which, at a symposium, Dan Morgenstern, an eminence in the field of jazz writing, recalled having seen Billie Holiday "eating chicken in a basket in a nightclub" (Qtd. Whyton 2010: 116). The gasping reaction of the audience at hearing this brings Whyton to reflect on the enthusiasts' "thirst for anecdotal stories, where any account of the past is a credible and *relevant* account, as long as it fits in with the established convention and is told by someone in authority." "The thought of Billie Holiday eating chicken in a basket," he later adds, "was beyond the comprehension of some audience members; a simple human act was received almost as myth in itself" (Whyton 2010: 116). Holiday being one of the great icons of jazz, the reaction of the followers is one of disbelief at the idea of her performing natural deeds equaling her to her fellow human creatures. In this sense, the anecdote in some way demystifies Holiday's aura. The point to Whyton's (not Morgenstern's) anecdote is to show that the competing forces between myth and fact within the mind of the enthusiast are always at play. Anxiety towards myth implies a predisposition towards myth. But anecdotes, more often than not, are recurrent tools

for myth-making, not for demystifying. The fact that Burns's film relies heavily on the anecdote for the development of a jazz history is not lost on Whyton, and we will return to some of his ideas as we move along in the analysis.

4.2.2. Anecdotes as Narrative Elements in *Jazz*

Carlyle reminds us that a „great man' is one who is the propagator of truth; but being a propagator, as I earlier explained, does not imply passiveness. The „great man' takes history into a new direction because his way of conveying the message of truth is completely innovative. Considering that in jazz, experimentation and innovation whilst in perpetual acknowledgement of the tradition is imperative for the evolvement into new schools and styles, it follows that many anecdotes will emphasize on this point. Burns's „great men' are creators; they are „thinker-tinkers.'

Beneath the omnipresent Ellington and Armstrong, Burns follows the creative patterns of Buddy Bolden, Jelly Roll Morton, Sidney Bechet, Fletcher Henderson, Bix Beiderbecke, Benny Goodman, Chick Webb, Lester Young, Count Basie, Coleman Hawkins, Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker, Ben Webster, Dave Brubeck, Miles Davis, Thelonius Monk, John Coltrane, and Ornette Coleman, among many others. Some profiles are granted a significantly wider narrative space than others, but for the most part, what binds them together is their musical inventiveness, which is simultaneously paired with personal charisma. We hear, for instance, Wynton Marsalis professing that "Buddy Bolden's innovation was one of personality. So instead of playing all this fast up, he would bring you the sound of Buddy Bolden" (Ep. 1, 29:08).[64] After an interlude in which the narrator stresses the genuinesss of Bolden's sound, Marsalis reappears as talking head to state that "Buddy Bolden invented that beat that we call the Big Four, that skip on the fourth beat or so legend has it" (Ep. 1, 29:54). Jelly Roll Morton is credited for "writing a host of tunes that would become jazz standards and he was the first to put his compositions down on paper" (Narrator Ep. 1, 38:33). This pattern based

[64] Quotations from the film will be referenced through the indication of the episode number and the minute in which the quotation begins. The film appears under the entry '*Jazz*' in References. Unless indicated otherwise, transcriptions from the film are my own.

on the musicians' creativity is repeated continuously. Marsalis praises Armstrong by providing a list of his accomplishments:

> Louis Armstrong invented a new style of playing. Louis Armstrong created the coherent solo. Louis Armstrong fused the sound of the blues with the American popular song. Louis Armstrong extended the range of the trumpet. Louis Armstrong created the melodic and rhythmic vocabulary that all of the big bands wrote music out of. (Ep. 2, 56:49)

Because Armstrong's presence is continuous throughout the series, such declarations are rephrased incessantly. For those „great men' whose portrayal is reduced to minutes (or even seconds), the achievement is condensed within short descriptions of their inventions (or reinventions of the idiom). Writer Gary Giddins's voice is heard over the exciting black and white footage of a performance by Jimmy Lunceford's band. As the band members entertain the audience with rhythmic gestures, Giddins is heard saying that "Jimmy Lunceford had the greatest showband there ever was. The guys in that band were beautiful. They had the best tailored uniforms in the business and they all looked great. And they had all kinds of hand things and they had novelty vocals" (Ep. 5, 23:50). While Lunceford's merit lies in his capacity for entertaining the masses, others have made it into the jazz canon for their ability to reinvent the sound of an instrument: Tommy Dorsey on the trombone, Teddy Wilson on the piano, Coleman Hawkins on the saxophone, etc. Parker, who is given a high profile, invents the bop approach to music, and even the impresario John Hammond invents jazz entrepreneurship. As the final episode takes on the matter of the future of the music and where jazz is going, one of the final, prophetic remarks is delivered by Giddins: "Some young musician is going to come along. Hopefully it will be someone really thrilling like Armstrong or Parker, somebody of extraordinary gifts, and he or she will play a music that no one else has heard and that will be the next movement" (Ep. 12, 54:30).

Burns's jazz history is a chronological arrangement of the biographies of „great men,' and men become „great men' for their innovations. When it comes to all those who are given a more detailed profile, Burns is sure to include their place of birth as much as their parents' occupations. Many lives take on the shape of the „from rags to riches' pattern, while others take the form of tragedy – even those musicians who come from middle-class families, such as Ellington or Miles Davis, have their own tragedies, on which the film is sure to make its due halt. Because of universal aspirations,

biographies must befit familiar, recognizable sequences. It is no coincidence that in the introduction to the first episode, just before the title appears onscreen, Albert Murray appears saying: "When you see a jazz musician playing you're looking at a pioneer, you're looking at an explorer, you're looking at an experimenter, you're looking at a scientist… You're looking at all those things because it's the creative process incarnate" (Ep. 1, 4:45). Jazz musicians embody not just any kind of ‚great men'; they are truly American archetypes.

In order to develop a grand mythistorical American narrative, anecdotes must not violate this agreement between jazz and national culture. If, as I stated earlier, anecdotes reinforce the sense of a communal identity, it follows that the more specific or specialized the anecdote, the narrower that community will be. If an anecdote involves, for example, musical technicisms unfamiliar to the listener, or feeds off information that is only available to jazz insiders, then the barriers between the community and outsiders are deepened. Crow hints this idea when he states that "musical jokes from outside the profession rarely tickle the funny-bones of the musicians" (1990: v). In the same way that jokes from outsiders fail in striking a humorous note within the jazz circles, so does membership within the jazz community become a more exclusive affair when the anecdote requires a vaster musical or historical knowledge on the part of the listener in order to be fully grasped.

As a film-maker with a pedagogical agenda and a mission to capture the democratic, American conventions of the music, Burns's choice of anecdotes is, I believe, greatly based on his desire to alienate outsiders as little as possible. Most, if not all the anecdotes included in *Jazz* appeal not to the language of the jazz community itself, but to those features which mold the identity of the American melting pot. In this way, Burns attempts to bridge the gaps between jazz insiders and outsiders; by drawing on the elements that bind, rather than distance, the two groups, he can more easily retain what Gracyk had called the "democratic thesis" while assuring entertainment value. Rather than following Whyton's taxonomy, I believe that anecdotes in *Jazz* call for an alternative form of classification, one based on the agreement between anecdote, the American ‚great man' and universal archetypes and mythemes: (1) anecdotes and creation myths, (2) anecdotes and the frontiersman/self-made man ethic, (3) anecdotes

and the American tragedy, (4) anecdotes and the resistance to European institutions, and (5) anecdotes and rebirth.[65]

4.2.2.1. Anecdotes and Creation Myths

These types of anecdotes are bound to the „great man's' inventiveness that I describe above. Meletinski identifies seven types of archaic creation myths, most of which have to do with some form of extraction (whether physical or verbal) or secration on the part of the god or demiurge, or with his stealing some sacred element from an antagonistic source. In any case, there are always three elements at play: "the object to be created, the material or source of the object, and the creator himself" (Meletinski 2000: 179). Burns's representation of the anecdote of how Armstrong invented scat singing includes all three roles.

The anecdote begins with a sepia-toned photograph of what appears to be either a newspaper clip marketing Armstrong's "Heebie Jeebies." The camera first shows the bottom of the clip, where the title to the song is provided beneath Armstrong's name. The camera then moves upwards, until we come to a close-up photograph of a congenial Armstrong wearing a bowtie. At the same time we are hearing the beginning of "Heebie Jeebies," over which the narrator speaks: "It was [in Chicago] that Armstrong introduced a new novelty number called „Heebie Jeebies,' in which he sang and also improvised sounds with his voice in a way few had ever heard outside of New Orleans" (Ep. 3, 06:45).

Visual and audio material then turns to a talking head, the singer Jon Hendricks. "Heebie Jeebies" plays on in the background, and Hendricks narrates the anecdote of the creation of scatting:

> There's an apocryphal story, which of course means it could or could not be true (I think it was true), that during the recording of a song called "Heebie

[65] Anne Dvinge's 2007 PhD Dissertation, *Between History and Hearsay: Imagining Jazz at the Turn of the 21st Century* has been very useful for the analysis of the type of audiovisual narratology used by Burns in the documentary. Dvinge illustrates the manner by which photographs, interviews, sounds, musical clips, shades and camera movements aid Burns's role as a storyteller. Her brilliant insight into the matter facilitates not only the reader/viewer's comprehension of the elaborate techniques inherent to the making of documentaries, but also the deconstruction of the mythologizing material itself.

> Jeebies" the music slipped off the music rack and onto the floor. And time in the studio in those days was so precious there was just no stopping and retaking. So [Louis Armstrong] just started to play the words with his voice just like he would do with his trumpet and that ended up being called scat singing. (Ep. 3, 07:00)

A shift is then made to a television clip of Louis Armstrong explaining from his perspective what happened at the recording session:

> We were playing "Heebie Jeebies" and I've got this music, and I don't know, it slipped out of my hand. I look in the control room and the president of Okeh Record Company kept waving, saying "Go ahead! Keep on!" And it dawned on me cause we used to scat sing (we didn't call it scat in those days) but we used to hum like instruments [illustrates by scatting on a few notes]. So when he said, "Keep on!" I said [scats]. That's how "Heebie Jeebies" went over and when we were finished he said, "Well, Satchmo, this is where scatting was born." (Ep. 3, 07:33)

Towards the end of Armstrong's account, the background music of "Heebie Jeebies" reaches its scatting choruses. There is a slight increase of the volume and the viewer is quickly shown another advertisement of the record. The narrator intervenes again, but the volume of Armstrong's scatting remains undiminished: "Armstrong's recording of „Heebie Jeebies' was released in 1926 and was a hit in black neighborhoods all across the country" (Ep.3, 08:19). We are then left to hear the remainder of the song as we are shown a series of sepia-colored pictures of 1920s black individuals, most of them smiling, and some of them immersed in some form of leisure. We reach a picture of a city bridge (most likely crossing the Chicago River) from a bird's eyeview, and the camera zooms in reverse, until the pieces of land that the bridge is connecting are exposed. The narrator condenses his last message within the time frame that this photograph is shown, as he quotes another authority figure:

> "For months after that," the Chicago clarinetist Mezz Mezzrow remembered, "you would hear cats greeting each other with Louis's riffs. Armstrong's scatting," Mezzow remembered, "almost drove the English language out of the windy city for good." (Narrator Ep. 3, 08:55)

The song concludes with a final photograph of Armstrong congenially hand-gesturing to a woman, who is also gesturing back.

About two minutes and forty seconds of film have been used to relate the anecdote, and it has proven to be enough time to use four sources as authority figures (the narrator, Hendricks, Armstrong, and Mezzrow). Despite the fact that Hendricks alludes to the anecdote's apocryphal nature, he asserts that he does believe it. The fact that Armstrong appears giving testimony of what apparently took place in the studio is used to persuade, convince the viewer that his account is indeed factual. It may have been so, but Armstrong may be embellishing the experience as well, to the point where he might perhaps be crediting the president of Okeh Records for christening this type of singing as „scatting.' Perhaps if such stories were to take place today in pop music, the notion of „publicity stunt' would quickly come to mind. But the anxiety of romanticizing the 1920s in the advent of the Jazz Age and the oral tradition that jazz culture is immersed in allures enthusiasts into believing and wanting to believe that Armstrong is being disinterested and absolutely faithful to his memory.

Factual or not, what is important is the type of mythological components that are involved in the story, and enhanced through the manipulation of audiovisual technique. The object created is scat singing, and the creator is Armstrong. The fact that scatting existed already in New Orleans (the material source of the object) is important to the extent that the creator must be represented as the incipient of a tradition; but it is he who, by being the first ever to record it, to materialize it into a durable, time-defying form, emerges as the inventor. The creator is also a messenger: the recording transcends spatial boundaries. In order to become familiarized with scatting one no longer needs to be within earshot of the actual singer, only within earshot of a recording. The message thus spreads throughout the community, bringing a new language that, as Mezzrow claims, is a warrior against conventional language. The Bible presents God creating the world and all its creatures through the use of His Word. Armstrong may even have created something that in a certain sense is greater: he uses verbal power to create nothing other than a new language in itself, a new instrument of communication.

Furthermore, there is a recognizably American trait in the anecdote: creation is not premeditated, it is improvised. Though the sequence of events leading to the creation may have been accidental (Armstrong drops the score, or in Hendrick's version, the sheet falls from the music rack), Armstrong immediately overcomes the difficulty. The president of Okeh Records does not tell him what to do, he merely points out that he will not stop the session. It is Armstrong who nimbly and dextereously

resolves the momentary crisis, becoming a hero in the process. His instinct, the grandest of American qualities, leads him to victory. Other musicians' creations are portrayed as the result of years of disciplined study and practice, but if Armstrong is to be represented as the other half to Duke Ellington, it is necessary to grace his creation with a talent that goes beyond premeditation. This is not to say that he did not discipline himself, for several times his commitment to and his seriousness towards his music are underscored. But if he stands, indeed, above all the other ‚great men' in jazz, he must be gifted in another unique way as well.

It is not infrequent to find allusions of Armstrong as the demiurge or some form of divine messenger. Wynton Marsalis says that Armstrong's case is a "rare occurrence in the history of music. He was chosen to bring the feeling, and the message, and the identity of jazz to everybody" (Ep. 2, 00:44). In a similar note, publicist Phoebe Jacobs says, "I don't believe Louis Armstrong was a real human being. I believe, I still believe, that God sent him to this earth to be a special messenger, and to make people happy, you see" (Ep. 2, 4:48). Gary Giddins, echoing Ellison's and Murray's writing, compares his genius to other ‚great men' of Western music and letters:

> Armstrong is, in a way, American music's Bach, American music's Dante, American music's Shakespeare. Why? Because he comes at a point in the music's history (it's not the birth of the music; it's been around for thirty years) but it's the moment when it becomes an art form. He is the figure who codifies, who assimilates everything that has happened before, and he shows where the future is going to be. (Ep.2, 05:39)

4.2.2.2. Anecdotes and the Frontiersman/Self-Made Man Ethic

The nineteenth-century frontiersman that modeled American popular literature through the fiction of James Fenimore Cooper, Owen Wister or Zane Grey has often found a niche in jazz literature as well. Ralph Ellison, a native of the Oklahoma territory, was among the first writers to note the links between the pragmatism and the improvisational drive of the frontiersman and the jazz musician. In his essay "Remembering Jimmy," he describes the blues singer as the bearer of "a romanticism native to the frontier, imposed upon the violent rawness of a part of the nation which only thirteen years before Rushing's birth was still Indian territory" (1995b: 245). Similarly, Albert Murray was inspired by the frontiersman ethic and lifestyle for his

characterization of Luzana Cholly in *Train Whistle Guitar*. Kabir Sehgal, whose *Jazzocracy* I criticized in the beginning of this study, relies heavily on the self-reliant spirit of the frontiersman and the self-made man to proclaim jazz as the aesthetic embodiment of democracy. What the frontiersman/self-made man archetype represents is the ultimate American hero; his deeds are the epic conquest of the wilderness, his most reliable tool is his instinct.

Steven W. Twing argues that "the rise of the corporation as the predominant pattern of business organization has dramatically changed U.S. society." Consequently, "the frontiersman character lost much of its meaning," and "within this new social landscape, a new representative character has emerged – the manager" (Twing 1998: 40). I would argue that at least in the development of a successful mythistorical, grand narrative, the frontiersman not only continues to instill the heroic traits of optimism and self-reliance, but moreover, is even aided by the listeners' or viewers' inclination towards nostalgic romanticizing. In *Jazz*, there emerges indeed the manager figure, the most representative of them being John Hammond, followed closely by Duke Ellington, when portrayed as a devoted band or orchestra leader with the dedication of a businessman. But in wider terms, all of the „great men' present some vital characteristic more evocative of the frontiersman than of the manager.

In *Jazz*, wilderness (or as Murray would have it, the dragon) takes on various forms, depending on the antinomy at hand. Most notably, racism is depicted as the most damaging, destructive and alienating force, the adversary of democracy. The courage and vitality of musicians is illustrated through several anecdotes: Bessie Smith singlehandedly confronting the Ku-Klux-Klan (I will return to this anecdote in the next chapter), Miles Davis refusing to obey an officer outside of Birdland, or Chick Webb defeating Benny Goodman in the notorious swing battle at the Savoy in 1937.[66]

[66] It must be clarified that although this anecdote represents the crowning of Chick Webb as the King of Swing in the documentary, there is no attempt to portray Goodman in any racist, denigrating sense. The fact that Goodman and his band members paid their respects to Chick Webb and acknowledge his triumph is strongly highlighted in the film. Rather, what appears to have been Burns's intention is to present one of the moments in which jazz (of which African Americans had been greatly dispossessed by white musicians such as Nick LaRocca, who claimed that blacks had had nothing to do with the creation of the music, or Paul Whiteman, who was given the title of the King of Jazz) returns to its roots. Chick Webb personifies the hero who has set off to accomplish the delicate task of returning a magical object to the kingdom, an object which is essential to sustain the community's identity.

The frontiersman is also a master of elegance and dexterity. A short anecdote on Duke Ellington, who is several times in the film referred to as a „race man,' exemplifies the elegance with which he confronted prejudice whilst exalting the optimism characteristic of the self-made man ethic. In the early 1930s, Duke Ellington's band makes a twelve-week tour through the South. The narrator explains that despite the fact that the tour was greatly successful, neither Ellington nor his men were allowed entrance to white hotels and restaurants. Ellington resolves to antagonize this „unpleasantness' through optimism and the high self-esteem and pride that his mother instilled upon him:

> After his Southern tour, rather than again suffer the indignity of being turned away from hotels and restaurants, Ellington and his manager, Irving Mills, saw to it that the orchestra travel in its own private pullman cars, eating and sleeping in the railroad yards between appearances. "The natives would come by and they would say „What on Earth is that?'" Ellington remembered, "And we would say, „That's the way the President travels. You do the very best with what you've got.'" (Ep. 4, 46:47)

It is significant that Ellington makes the pullman his own machine of conquest: the railroad, the quintessential instrument to defeat the wilderness, is stylized in accordance to a more democratic, racially unbiased spirit. As he spreads his music throughout the South, he conquers not only the territory, but the vehicle that is also itself an explorer of the Southern and Western frontiers.

Another anecdote that emphasizes territorial conquest is the date of Benny Goodman's first engagement in Los Angeles. In 1935 the "Let's Dance" radio program that weekly featured Goodman's band was cancelled. The band's manager arranged for a tour across the country, despite the fact that Goodman was sceptical about what the Western audiences' reactions to swing would be. His perceptions were well founded, and as they toured through the West that summer they encountered obstacle after obstacle. In Denver, the manager of a dance hall demanded they leave after playing for half an hour. In another gig in Colorado, the band was forced to play behind chicken-wire, so as to protect themselves from the bottles that were being thrown at them.

Throughout the narrator's description of the tour, one of Goodman's swing tunes has been playing in the background. But when the narrative comes to August 21, 1935, when the weary band reaches Los Angeles to play at the Palomar Ballroom, the music

halts and gives way to a background noise of street traffic and city hustle. The camera travels through a photograph, showing a traffic jam and reaching the sidewalk, where an immense crowd is gathered. Historian James Lincoln Collier, one of the most featured talking heads, describes the situation: "[Goodman's band] found this enormous throng of people lined up around the block, waiting to get in. And they thought, „Well, wait a minute; what's this? It can't be for us" (Ep. 4, 54:54). We turn to another black and white picture of Goodman exchanging a few words with an audience member, over which we now hear Gary Giddins's comments:

> Benny now has been told by every ballroom owner across the country not to play the jazz stuff. They just want to hear the dance tunes. [The camera zooms closer to Goodman, bringing the spectator closer to Goodman's thoughts, in an effort to sympathise with his cautiousness.] So he's not taking any chances. [Sweet dance music becomes the soundtrack. A picture of Goodman is shown playing his clarinet, holding it in the standard manner.] So they start playing the waltzes, the pop, the stock arrangements, and the audience is just kind of milling around; there's no response. (Ep. 4, 55:08)

Two pictures of Goodman playing before an audience are then shown. In both instances, the audience is relaxed, calmed, many of them looking up to Goodman with their arms crossed and an impassive countenance. The camera zooms into audience members to emphasize on the vacant stares and idle body language. Collier continues with the story:

> And so they're doing this and it wasn't going very well and Bunny Berrigan or somebody in the band said, "The heck with this! If we're going to go down, let's go down doing the kind of music we want to play!" [Soundtrack turns to hot jazz.] So they brought out "King Porter Stomp." (Ep. 4, 55:48)

A sequence of pictures intensifies the crowd's growing elation, peppered with the sound of cheering, whistling and clapping. From smiling audience members we turn to a crowd with their hands up. "That's what they were waiting for," Giddins adds, "they'd been listening to this stuff on the radio and that's what they wanted to hear, this jazz music!" (Ep. 4, 56:25). "The audience was cheering, crowding around the bandstand, and shouting and jumping. And they couldn't believe it, they were absolutely stunned! And the next morning Benny Goodman was famous" (Ep. 4, 56:35), Collier chips in. For the next forty seconds, as the clarinet solos in the background, the

sequence of pictures continues. Audience members dance, grin, and are frozen by the stills in open body language. The camera's travelling through the pictures aids the sensation of dance movement as much as it drives forward the narrative. The close-ups to specific audience members and to members of the band, including a jubilant Goodman, are used as metonymies of the ballroom atmosphere. We are shown the individual as much as the collective spirit through these shots. The camera travels following the gaze of a young man until it reaches Goodman – the camera movement, hence, moves from the effect to the cause, from the „created' (the celebrative spirit) to the creator. The Goodman that was holding his clarinet in the standard form has now been replaced by a Goodman holding his instrument upwards, as if blowing into the heavens. As the camera zooms into a close-up of an overjoyed Goodman in another picture, the narrator breaks in: "The sound of swing, that had begun with Louis Armstrong, and had been nurtured in the dance halls of Harlem, was now echoing across the country. The Swing Era was about to begin" (Ep. 4, 57:40). An upwards travelling of another picture begins, following Goodman's body, until we come to the final, eternal image of his countenance. His closed eyes and his grin directed upwards, into the above, possess a sanctified quality; the „great man' is frozen in the moment in which he has been blessed.

Goodman has conquered the American territory even if only such a conquest has been one of the coastlines. Because the East and the West coasts represent and encapsule the country, whatever message they have come across will soon spread throughout what is contained within. Goodman has endured and subsisted through the wilderness, and by delivering swing music to the nation's West coast, he has connected the territory, created a single, absorbing identity that will define a whole era. The anecdote represents the victorious quest of a modern frontiersman in the form of a jazz musician.

4.2.2.3. Anecdotes and the American Tragedy

But for a war to reach epic proportions, a storyteller must also apply him or herself in the narrating of those battles that were lost. Racism / democracy being the central mytheme of *Jazz*, Burns delves within those accounts where prejudice proved to be too powerful a dragon, and tore the spirit of many „great men' unable to sustain the

optimism that allowed Duke Ellington or Armstrong to come through. Lee B. Brown notices the film's penchant towards the tragic descent of tortured souls, with one of the most representative moments being how "we hear *New York Times* columnist Margo Jefferson opine that Bix Beiderbecke drank himself to death because he wasn't allowed to play with black musicians" (2002: 158). Other musicians are driven into madness: Buddy Bolden spends his final days at the Louisiana State Insane Asylum, and Freddie Keppard becomes paranoid, fearing that other musicians would copy his style. Racism is portrayed as the central motive behind many of the 1940s and 1950s musicians' heroine addiction and alcoholism. Charlie Parker incarnates the ultimate victim, the quintessential American martyr, and several anecdotes regarding his inner demons construe the image of his tormented genius – from his asking another band member to pinch him with a pin to retrieve him from the lethargy he was prone to fall into, to his desperate wandering across a desert in search of a fix, and even to the reading of the four telegrams he sent his wife, Chan, the night of their daughter's death. These telegrams, short as they are, condense the agonizing feelings and suicidal drives that Parker continues to be remembered for.

Even though other personal causes certainly may have been involved in the deterioration of many of the ‚great men,' the film's overall tone fosters the belief that racism was the determining factor. At the closing of Episode 1, a pensive and deeply affected Marsalis presents a remark that resonates throughout the rest of the documentary. His initial utterances, in which he takes his time and introspectively searches for the most adequate words and metaphors to use are not edited out, perhaps because Burns wants to convey not only the complexity of the race war, but also to show glimpses of the seriousness and the historically-grounded mood of affliction that such a topic triggers:

> Well, race is a… Race is like… for this country it's like the thing in the story in the mythology that you have to do for the kingdom to be well. And it's always something you don't want to do, and it's always the thing that is so much about you confronting yourself, that is taylor-made for you to feel dealing with it. And the question of your heroism, and of your courage and of your success at dealing with this trial is: can you confront it with honesty? And do you confront it, and do you have the energy to sustain an attack on it? And since jazz music is at the center of American mythology, it necessarily deals with race. It's an age-old story, you know; if it's not race,

> it's something else. But in this particular instance, in this particular nation, it is race. (Marsalis Ep. 1, 56:39)

Most of the anecdotes regarding the race dragon are recounted by the narrator, or a talking head speaking about a third person. But now and again there surface testimonial anecdotes, where the speaker delivers a first-hand account of things „as they actually happened.' Whyton notes that "testimony is seen as an essential ingredient in the telling and preservation of history, offering the recipient a direct route into the past" (2010: 119). Indeed, because of the speaker's first-hand experience, the amount of reliability invested upon him or her is of a great magnitude, and the narration filters out other information that could distract the listener from reaching the „truth.' Whyton distinguishes between historical testimony, clinical testimony, and poetic testimony. "Historical testimony" is "recognized throughout the jazz world and used widely by those dedicated to constructing a canonical framework of the music" (Whyton 2010: 119). "Clinical testimony," on the other hand, has therapeutic results: "Jazz musicians," Whyton says, "will express the need to tell their story, almost as if to relieve themselves of the burden of history" (2010: 121). Lastly, "poetic testimony" adheres less to fact, although it remains a doorway to truth. "Although not representative of something that happened factually," Whyton explains, "poetic testimony retains a symbolic function, unlocking doors to historical experience and emotion." It is "not an expression of exactitude and detail, but an expression of emotion or experience" (2010: 123).

One of the most compelling clinical testimonies of *Jazz* is narrated by renowed pianist Dave Brubeck. He recalls the situation in America after returning from Europe, where not only had jazz functioned as a symbol of democracy and freedom against Nazism, but also where colored troops had shed their blood for the hope of a better world. As a picture of the segregated entrances to a café is shown, followed by a close-up on a black soldier, Brubeck begins to speak:

> When we landed in Texas, we all went to the dining room to eat, and they wouldn't serve the black guys. The guys had to go around and stand at the kitchen door. This one guy said he wouldn't eat any of their food, and he started to cry, and he said, "What I've been through… And the first day I'm back in the United States I can't even eat with you guys." He said, "I wonder why I went through all this." (Ep. 8, 51:09)

This tragic anecdote is followed by a connection to another distant memory, back to Brubeck's childhood:

> You know the first black man that I saw, my dad took me to see on the Sacramento River in California. And he said to his friend, "Open your shirt for Dave." There was a brand on his chest. And my dad said, "These things can't happen." That's what I fought for what I fought for. (Ep. 8, 51:54)

The camera fades from Brubeck, who by now is on the verge of tears, into darkness. One finds it impossible not to be moved by Brubeck's sincere affliction, by his honesty towards these memories that so painfully dwell within him. His trauma pays homage to all those black soldiers who returned home to the same prejudice they had been battling against overseas. His anecdote emerges, at the same time, with the symbolic force of the "poetic anecdote." The degree to which his anecdotes adhere to fact (for the record, I strongly believe they genuinely do) becomes, in a way, secondary. What is particularly poignant is the mixture of word and immediate emotion, and it is this cathartic moment, this point in the expiation of pain, where a truth that lies deep beyond documents, timetables, footage or photographs can be reached. It is the trauma of segregation as it was truly lived, and as it is truly remembered.

In a subsequent episode, an additional testimonial anecdote is recalled by Brubeck. With the roaring success of the Brubeck Quartet's *Time Out* album, which would go on to sell more than a million copies, the pianist reached national fame. In November 1954, he was on tour with Duke Ellington when a bitter event took place. As the viewer is shown a picture of Brubeck and Duke together, the camera slowly zooms into the latter's face as Brubeck begins to speak:

> I heard a knock on my hotel room at seven o'clock in the morning [camera shifts to Brubeck as talking head] and it was Duke. And he said, "Dave, you're on the cover of *Time Magazine*." And my heart sank because I wanted to be on the cover after Duke. I didn't want to be on the cover before Duke – because they were doing stories on both of us. The worst thing that could have happened to me was that I was there before Duke and that he was delivering the magazine to me, saying, "Here." (Ep.10, 42:15)

Brubeck smiles as he says the last remark, but this does not make the experience any less bitter. Contrary to the previus clinical testimonies, this anecdote, although also invested in the antinomy racism / democracy, is more in the line of the "historical

testimony," whereby we return to the canonization of jazz music. The fact that Brubeck appears before Duke on such a popular and representative publication as *Time* is used to show that America was still confused about race. Whyton mentions that "historical testimonies" are especially useful when "historical accuracy is challenged or in doubt. First-hand accounts of events help to set the record straight when give weight to a dominant interpretation of the past" (2010: 120). As the film is faithful to the jazz grand narrative and the jazz canon, it follows the premise that Duke Ellington is and will always remain America's greatest composer. The *Time* anecdote reasserts this idea by having Brubeck setting the record straight. The fact that he himself did not think it fair or reasonable that he appeared before Ellington on the cover not only goes to show the extent to which America was deceiving itself on the basis of such a destructive cultural construct as race, but also, in a sense, to rewrite history the way it *should have* happened. This alternative not only would have proved to be a more democratic one, but it would also have been one to supply the canon with the coherence that it nurtures on.

4.2.2.4. Anecdotes and the 'Resistance' to Eurocentric Institutions

Concomitant to the racism / democracy mytheme is the entertainment / high art binarism. I have already explained numerous times the relevancy that this subject has within the jazz canon and tradition. Gracyk argues that, in *Jazz*, this strain between the commercial and refined taste leads to a "resulting story [that] is incoherent" (2002: 185). While the latter years of the swing movement are harshly battered for the musicians' commercial drive, the film, on the other hand, represents Duke Ellington's unexpected and explosive success at the 1956 Newport Jazz Festival as the victorious rebirth of a genius (not only because of how the event itself took place, as saxophonist Paul Gonsalves thrillingly played through twenty-seven choruses, but also because the album would become Ellington's highest-selling record). The film, Gracyk contends, is unable to come to terms with the distinction particularly when it comes to historicizing the last forty years of the jazz scenario in the last episode. Where bebop had been presented as the natural outcome to the Swing Era because it reacted against its musical conventions and commercial interests,[67] Ornette Coleman's free jazz in the late 1950s

[67] The swing movement itself presents a series of complications for the binarism. On the one hand, swing was the closest jazz ever got to becoming America's most popular music, and given its

and early 1960s is not given the same respect. Bebop had been drastically experimental and innovative, and it took time for it to earn itself an audience. The average, non-musician usually found it hard to follow the harmonic approach and the velocity with which soloists soared through chords and chord changes. Adding to this was the anti-dance policy that forced the listener to focus his senses on the contemplation of the music. Not unlike bop, free jazz erupted into the scene and broke all forms of musical conventions, requiring that its audience focus solely on the innovations themselves. Despite the similarities, Burns's perspective is particularly harsh on free jazz:

> Ornette Coleman is one of only three musicians in the ten episodes of *Jazz* to receive extended overt scorn and abuse from other jazz musicians. The narration emphasizes that most bebop musicians scorned Coleman's quartet . . . Miles Davis calls Coleman "all screwed up" and Albert Murray dismisses free jazz as "absolutely self-indulgent." . . . Wynton Marsalis compares it to the babbling of infants. (Gracyk 2002: 180).

Indeed, the narrative is indecisive when it comes to what to make of popular perception of the music. Not only is this the result of the biased perspectives of the most featured talking heads, but also it appears to greatly depend on what „great man' is being potrayed at that moment. In the same way that Ellington's comeback through the Newport Jazz Festival is viewed as a triumph, so is Armstrong's recording of the highly acclaimed "Hello Dolly!" which briefly surpassed The Beatles in the billboard charts. These anecdotes contest the repeated notion that sales do not indicate prodigiousness (the popularity that the Original Dixieland Jazz Band and Paul Whiteman had is deemed as an act of dispossession from African American culture, and also as „whitened' styles of jazz that sought commercialism, and therefore were not true to the music). In the case of Ellington, the film compensates, however, for this imbalance, by presenting

---

central role in representing democracy within and abroad, the film cannot undermine it on the basis of commercialism. On the other hand, swing's emphasis on dancing and on pure entertainment seems antithetical to the notion that jazz rituals were to be reproduced in a more somber atmosphere (such is the way that bop pushes jazz into becoming a high art). The resolution that Burns takes, which is not without its complications, is to only criticize the latter swing years for an alleged lack of novelty, a repetitiveness of arrangements and a shunning of experimentation. Cheap imitations of Benny Goodman's or Chick Webb's bands deteriorate the swing idiom until it becomes a music of clichés, until it ceases to push into the future and accommodates within stagnancy.

commercialism only as a secondary objective. Above material benefits, the composer is portrayed as driven by the need to be true to his inner self. Burns illustrates this with an anecdote extracted from Ellington's autobiography, *Music Is My Mistress*, in which he recalls a decisive encounter with the violinist, conductor and composer, Will Marion Cook. The narrator of *Jazz* summarizes their conversation as follows:

> During long taxi rides through Central Park, the two men talked about music. Cook urged Ellington to get formal training at a conservatory. Ellington didn't feel he had time for that. "They're not teaching what I want to learn," he said. "In that case," Cook told him, "first find the logical way, and when you find it, avoid it, and let your inner self break through and guide you. Don't try to be anybody else but yourself." It was advice Duke Ellington would follow all his life. (Ep. 2, 39:46)

By appealing to the frontiersman/self-made man ethic, Ellington, much like Armstrong, is not only redeemed from judgement when it comes to the commercial interests they might have had, but furthermore, his commercial success is presented as the natural outcome of his ethical commitment to himself. In other words, because he has been true to himself and true to the moral immaculateness of the self-made man, he is compensated for his efforts. While others have done what was expected of them and complied to conventions and commercial demands, „great men' in the line of Ellington or Armstrong have applied the experimental, instinctual attitude of the American hero archetype and have not only been rewarded materially for it, but have also been instrumental in advancing the idiom, in providing it with the basic structure for the development of a tradition.

Armstrong bursts into the scene in a manner that implodes and ridicules highbrow assumptions of what constitutes art and what does not. Giddins summarizes Armstrong's historical significance regarding the problematic debate as follows:

> As late as the 1920s and probably for some years afterwards, you have all the Harvard Brahmins and the Northeastern musical establishment routinely meeting and discussing where is American music, how are we going to develop a truly American music. Of course, they're assuming they're going to find the great American musician in the only place they know where to look, which is the academy, their home, and they assume it's going to be in the only tradition they know, which is the European tradition. So they are not at all conscious of the fact that at the same time that they're agonizing,

> looking for an American Bach, that he's there, but he doesn't fit their description. (Ep. 3, 03:53)

When it comes to many of the „great men' of jazz, therefore, commercialism and artistry become compatible aspects. Moreover, because these „great men' are also delineators of an American collective identity through their self-made man ethic, their achievements are also portrayed as definitive moments in the destruction of Eurocentric aesthetic norms.

In his essay, "The Emergence of the Jazz Concert, 1935-1945," Scott DeVeaux explains the connotations that the notion of concert bears, as a social practice, within America:

> A „œoncert,' of course, denotes nothing more than a musical performance, but to the average American it means much more. As part of the legacy from the European art music tradition, the concert has carried with it a rich set of associations as well as considerable social prestige. The concert is a solemn ritual, with music the object of reverent contemplation. Certain formalities are imposed upon the concert audience: people attend in formal dress, sit quietly and attentively with little outward bodily movement, and restrict their response to applause at appropriate moments only. (1989: 6)

In *Jazz*, one of the most glorious moments in the triumph of jazz over the academy is the narration of Benny Goodman's formal concert in Carnegie Hall on January 16, 1938. The show was sold out; "in the audience, there were classical musicians and music critics and concert-goers in tuxedos and evening gowns" (Narrator Ep. 6, 36:22). Collier explains the seriousness of the occasion, and how it intimidated the band:

> In those days, the idea of bringing a swing band into Carnegie Hall was scandalous. The players were very nervous and they thought, "What are we doing here?" Harry James peeked out from behind the curtain and took a look at this great throng out there and said, "I feel like a whore in church." (Ep. 6, 36:28)

We begin to hear the opening number at Carnegie Hall, and historian Phil Schapp says that "they are stiff, and the band is scared" (Ep. 6, 37:02). He goes on to describe the heroic moment for which the concert is now remembered as a turning point in jazz history:

> Gene Krupa, what he did for Goodman, should always be acknowledged. He said, "This band sounds sad, we're going to bomb, we're in trouble." And he knows that he has to do something – he's not trying to wake up the crowd; he's trying to wake up the band, he's trying to relax them or scare them beyond their fear. And he gets into that break in the arrangement, he hits every piece of equipment in his drum kit as loud as he can and as many times as he can in something that is nearly cacophonous. It doesn't make any sense except in the emotional content – he's trying to bum this band's hump. He's [like], "Come on, get up on my back again and I'll teach you how to swing again cause you guys forgot!" (Schapp Ep. 6, 37:08)

So far, the only visual material intersecting with the talking head have been photographs of the band and of Krupa, emphasizing the motionlessness, the consternation that we hear in the insecure performance. The film turns to the footage of Krupa's amazing break, and actual footage is now used, skipping from shots of the whole band, to tapping feet, to Goodman playing with his clarinet pointed upwards, etc., as the music suddenly takes on an exciting turn. At the end of the number we hear the enthusiastic clapping of the audience, and the visuals shift to a picture of Goodman and then to a picture of Krupa. They appear to be looking at one another, and the film is sure to underscore this complicity by switching back and forth between the two shots, at the same time that it closes up on each of them. In this instance, the photos are manipulated so as to preserve, eternalize a partnership thanks to which jazz triumphed over Eurocentric institutions and conventions. It is not only a matter of it being a moment in which jazz is accepted as a high art, it is also to stress the fact that individualistic as jazz may be in many of its aspects, it is also a collective art, based on the collective commitment to the music and complicity between the players. Much like democracy, the individual is not annulled by the ensemble, but projected into a superior state of social being.

After hearing another break by Krupa, the narrator relates the rest of the event as follows:

> During the historic concert, other jazz musicians, including Count Basie and members of his band, took part in a jam session. The finale was Goodman's most popular tune, "Sing, Sing, Sing," and the highlight of the evening. Young people and older concert-goers alike got up and danced in the aisles of the state-old hall. (Ep. 6, 38:39)

Footage of audience members snapping their fingers, tapping their feet and gesturing to the rhythm of the music is combined with footage of the musicians playing enthusiastically. When the number finishes, enthusiastic clapping is heard, and a final frontal picture of Goodman, gazing into the upper balconies suddenly freezes all visual movement. As the camera makes a close-up on his countenance, the narrator quotes Goodman saying, "I think the band I had at Carnegie Hall was the best I ever had" (Ep. 6, 39:27).

In spite of the fact that, as Gracyk points out, the incoherence with which Burns construes the high art / commercialism antinomy becomes a notable fault within the narrative, the film, at least up until the final episode, finds alternative ways with which to, at least temporarily, deal with the ambivalence. The way through which to come to terms with commercialism is by, as we have seen, emphasizing the virtues of the ‚great man' as an American archetype, and appealing to the dynamics of the epic. By using such dynamics, the troublesome issue of commercialism is overshadowed by a story of how American identity and the American spirit strove in the face of adversity, and defeated old-world conventions in its own arena, its own dominion. The concert anecdote thus appears as a parable whereupon European norm ceases to intimidate the individual, emerging from the gut-source of such a European symbol as Carnegie Hall the vitalism of a new-world order.

Anecdotes are a fundamental part of *Jazz* for several reasons: they upgrade the entertainment value of the documentary by appealing not necessarily to the jazz-specific, but to the culture-specific symbols, they reduce the highly alembricated history of jazz to a series of recognizable patterns, and they present fundamental instruments through which to create as coherent and cohesive a story as possible. I have emphasized on the interplay between the visual and the auditory material to illustrate not only the way by which the anecdotes build up their own climactic moments, by which they become carefully-structed narrations within the narrative, but also to point to the mythistorical tendency towards the illumination of truth. Surely in these anecdotes there abound generalizations, hyperboles, metaphors and metonymies that stretch or reinvent the actual facts behind the story; but if such is the way in which they are remembered, and therefore, in which they are lived today within the jazz and the American tradition,

then distortion ceases to be of significant importance. The object with which fact and the documents are replaced is much more valuable for the strengthening of a shared historical knowledge, especially when we consider that the target audience of *Jazz* was not necessarily the jazz subculture, but the American public who tuned in to hear and learn about their nation.

4.3. PATRIARCHAL DISCOURSE AND THE HERO MONOMYTH IN *JAZZ*

Despite the fact that *Jazz* was fundamentally condemned by critics and musicians for its racially-based selection of „great men' and for its lack of coverage of 1960s, 1970s, 1980s and 1990s jazz, a number of scholars also raised their voices in disapproval of the evident absence of women throughout the film. In this section I collect the arguments and ideas professed by scholars such as Anne Dvinge and Sherrie Tucker to illustrate the manner by which women are manipulated and objectified so as to contribute to an overall masculinist mythistory. I approach not only the scant jazz women who appear on the film, but also those women whose personal relationship to certain jazz icons is construed under archetypal paradigms. These women I will refer to as the documentary's „peripheral women,' the female non-musicians who played a fundamental part in some of the men's lives. By viewing the kinds of roles these women perform (and I purposely use the term „perform,' for the only interest they hold in the narrative is at a functional level for the development of the man at hand) we may better appreciate how biographies are shaped and molded until they resemble the Western hero monomyth.

There is, indeed, little commitment to (black) feminism on the part of Burns, particularly to the kind of black feminism that was still effervescent during the six years that Burns spent gathering his material and developing his story. We might recall that, along with Alice Walker's fictionalized womanist version of the blues singer, significant publications such as Hazel Carby's "It Jus Be's That Way Sometimes: The Sexual Politics of Women's Blues," Daphne Duval Harrison's *Black Pearls*, and Angela Davis's *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism* began, in the mid-1980s and the 1990s, a new exegesis of female blues singers to reveal the early feminist attitudes held within their discourse. The notion of physical and psychological agency was the key element from which to sustain that blues singers represented the original black feminist artists, using rhetorical techniques ranging from signifying to *nommo*, and envisioning sisterhood as a viable alternative to the familial structure and as a means of emotional release. Yet *Jazz* seems impermeable, if not oblivious, to this branch of postcolonial criticism. Women, whether they be musicians or not, still retain the same role that they have always had within traditional jazz histories. Burns reinstates the more conventional and audience-friendly male-centered approach to jazz.

My intention, nonetheless, is not to enumerate all the aspects that make the film a negligible contribution to the field of feminism. By presenting Tucker's and Dvinge's main points and adding a few of my own, my aim is rather to address the complex issues that are involved in representations of gender within jazz, especially when we find ourselves confronting a mythistorical form of historiography. Tucker herself warns against making Burns the scapegoat of a type of narration that has gone on for decades: "It is important," she states, "to emphasize that Burns did not invent these privileged narratives of jazz discourse, nor is he responsible for the longevity of dominant desires that make them marketable to major funding agencies" (2002: 378). In a similar line, Jeffrey Taylor has argued that despite scholarly attempts to define the "interactive nature" of the music, mainstream jazz histories, "from Frederick [*sic*] Ramsey Jr. to Ken Burns," have followed the same formula to create "the story of soloists" (2008: 56). Burns's use of a male-centered history of soloists within which all complexities, binarisms and contradictions of jazz are absorbed is, in fact, only a perpetuation of a tradition that had for long been empowered before the appearance of *Jazz.*

4.3.1. Cross-Gender References and Asexual Constructions of Jazz Women

We may begin with a quantitative contrast between the number of male and female interviewees consulted and appearing as talking heads. There are around twenty musicians interviewed for the film, from which only three are women: Joya Sherril, Abbey Lincoln, and Cassandra Wilson – all of them singers. Not a single woman is given the chance to articulate her experience and heritage as an instrumentalist. Out of the numerous writers and critics, only Margo Jefferson has a recurrent role as talking head. More importantly, as Dvinge (2007) observes in her analysis of the transcripts to the interviews, much of the feminist remarks delivered, mostly by Jefferson, were not used for the final editing of the documentary.[68] What possible statements could have

[68] Most of the transcripts of the interviews are available at the *Jazz* website: <http://www.pbs.org/jazz/>. Reviewing these transcripts, Dvinge notices a very short but telling comment that was made by Jefferson, and through which she wittily reveals her discomfort about some of the choices that have been made on the kind of narrative that *Jazz* is building up to be. In Dvinge's words,

been used to initiate a discussion on sex and gender variables in jazz under the scope of feminism are overlooked. There is simply no voice of authority on the topic to even hint that the matter has been a central part of jazz studies for the last years.

In the first episode, the narrator anticipates that "the remarkable men and women who created jazz came from every part of the country and every walk of life, but they could all do something most people can only dream of: create art on the spot" (Ep. 1, 5:05). Contrary to the content of the claim, a carefully selected number of women figure as part of the "remarkable" people throughout the film. From *Jazz*'s long list of revolutionary men, only the following women made the cut: Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald, and Sarah Vaughan – all of them singers. Brief mentions of Mary Lou Williams, Anita O'Day, Lil Hardin, Mildred Bailey, Melba Liston, Abbey Lincoln, and Cassandra Wilson occasionally spice up the narrative. The first five are women included inside a series of masculine names and the last two have an average of a three-minute film space each inside the total duration of twelve hours.

Dvinge ascertains that "the few women artists that are portrayed in detail in the film are described with almost masculine characteristics: tough, hard drinking and hard living" (2007: 23). Indeed, there is a sequential logic between the art of Bessie Smith and that of Billie Holiday and Ella Fitzgerald that echoes that masculinity. Let us summarize the male-hero monomyth around which *Jazz*'s use of ‚great men' revolves in the following sequences:

1) A young boy (usually black) is raised in an atmosphere of devastating poverty. (There are alternative patterns, however, such as in the case of Duke Ellington and Miles Davis, who were born into middle-class families).
2) Psychologically, the boy prematurely surpasses his childhood because he soon awakens to the hostility of racism and segregation.
3) The young man answers to his natural talent for aesthetic creation and develops a unique style of playing in order to cope with and to confront racial prejudice. His personal tone, his phrasing, his breath, his speed, his particular drift when swinging (or any other aspect that makes him musically distinctive) is meant to

---

Jefferson also senses the gender bias at an instance when she starts talking of Ethel Waters and Bessie Smith. The interviewer answers: "We haven't gotten to Ethel Waters and Bessie Smith yet. You can mention them but we won't use it." Jefferson's response constitutes a clear critique: "That's why women don't feel entitled to be." (2007: 80)

react or to signify upon the contradictions implicit in the actual practice of American freedom, equality, and democracy.

4) Throughout his career, there is an evolution in his music and in his personality. Directional changes are marked by traumatic experiences such as substance abuse, social aversion towards the idea of integrated jazz bands, the irony of post-World War II racial prejudice, economic drainage, and the threat of becoming musically outdated and the object of harsh criticism. Because of this, certain personality traits are either reaffirmed or permuted (Armstrong publicly defends the traditional form of New Orleans jazz against the beboppers, Sonny Rollins occasionally stops performing and enters into periods of meditative solitude, Miles Davis develops an aggressive and arrogant temperament, John Coltrane embraces Eastern religion, etc.).
5) Often the man's life ends tragically (Buddy Bolden spends a third of his life in a mental asylum, Bix Beiderbecke kills himself, an ailing Charlie Parker chokes to death, Chick Webb succumbs to his life-long spinal defect, etc.). Other times, the „great man' reaches old age with a mature awareness and a deep understanding (reflected musically) of the racial situation around him. In either case, the gifted genius leads an afterlife through the immortality of his music. His legacy is extended and refined by new generations, who become the bearers of the aesthetic and who, because of their unique talent and their experiences as American blacks, find a way to innovate the jazz idiom so as to keep the flux of the tradition alive forever.

The pattern of the monomyth is meant to be universal. What we learn about the women portrayed in detail are anecdotes, hearsay, and descriptions belonging to one of the stages or one of the features mentioned above. What is of interest is that, as if to justify the inclusion of the subject at hand within the same monomyth as her male counterparts, the narrator tends to insist on the subject's masculine traits.

The first to be presented in detail is Bessie Smith, and already the characterization towards masculinity establishes the tone: "Smith drank hard and had a fearful temper. If she didn't like the way things were going onstage, she sometimes tore the curtains down around her. She could not abide rivals and distrusted powerful accompanists for fear they'd steal the spotlight" (Narrator Ep. 2, 11:42). Following this description, and with her recording of "Ain't Nobody's Business If I Do" as the

soundtrack, is the story of how she confronted the Ku Klux Klan in one of her tent shows. The men, bewildered by her tough attitude, aborted all plans to attack and left.

Next in the women's list is Billie Holiday, whose life and career are often picked up throughout the rest of the episodes, following chronological order. Holiday's case is perhaps the most transparent one of all; allusions to her tribulations and suffering are constant, as are the codas made by the narrator to assert that all her pain only made her singing all the more charismatic. In the same way as male members are introduced, the narrator presents her through a brief but carefully constructed account of her early years:

> [Holiday] yearned all of her childhood for her mostly absent father, Clarence Holiday, who once played with Fletcher Henderson. Her father's flashy example helped lure her into the music business, but his hustling ways were mirrored in many of the predatory men to whom she would be attracted all her life. She was molested and abused as a child and by the age of twelve she was working as a prostitute in a waterfront whore-house. (Ep. 5, 43:15)

The background singing of Bessie Smith along these lines suggests a continuation of the blues woman's legacy. Holiday herself claimed that she was mostly inspired by the art of Smith and of Louis Armstrong, and Burns makes it a point to cast her as the natural heir of Smith's singing style as much as of her life-long painful trials. Minutes afterwards, the narrator continues:

> Holiday was fiercely independent. A woman who had known her since childhood said she was just ‚don't carish.' Billie Holiday would remain 'don't carish' for the rest of her life: cursing, drinking, brawling, pursuing partners of both sexes, leading a life so close to the edge that it was a wonder to her friends that she managed to survive. But out of all of it, she made unforgettable art and would eventually become the most important female vocalist in the history of jazz." (Ep. 5, 47:25)

The next episode again emphasizes Holiday's excess of habits and characteristically masculine behavior:

> [Count Basie] understood both [Holiday's] talent and her temperament. When the band went on tour, she drank, and cursed, and gambled with the men on the bus as if she were one of them, and won so much money shooting dice that when Christmas came she had to lend the losers cash

> to buy presents for their families back home. “She was like a man,” Sweets Edison said, “only feminine.” (Ep. 6, 30:30)

So far Holiday has enmeshed perfectly inside the scheme of ‚great men’: she has had a difficult childhood, she understands the burdens of poverty and racism and counteracts them through her singing and through a resilience of character common to all the musicians who have had to endure the perils of blackness. The narrator reaffirms Holiday’s position inside the masculine world of jazz when he again emphasizes her defiant cockiness and her muscularity. Onscreen there is a black and white photo of her in a fur coat and dark glasses. Over the rim of her glasses Holiday shows a raised eyebrow, and in this specifically pimp-like image that resembles the fashion and personal aesthetic of contemporary musicians, especially in the sphere of rap and hip hop, the narrator says that:

> Her new celebrity did nothing to curtail the toughness for which she’d been known since childhood. When two drunken white sailors snuffed out their cigarettes on her fur coat one night, she told them she’d meet them outside and beat them both senseless with her fists. (Ep. 8, 15:21)

Holiday is further integrated into masculinity when the narrator features her (as well as Anita O’Day) in the lengthy list of male musicians who became drug addicts. According to the film, her dependence was the result of her close contact with the wrong kind of men. As the camera slowly makes a close-up on a picture of Holiday smoking, the narrator describes how “in 1941 she married a sometime marihuana dealer named Jimmy Monroe and began smoking opium. Then she moved in with a good-looking trumpet player named Joe Guy. He was addicted to heroin. Soon she would be using it to” (Ep. 8, 15:46).

Notwithstanding the additional commentaries from both narrator and talking heads on her mesmerizing vocal qualities and her often repeated ability to reinvent the content of Tin Pan Alley songs, Holiday is illustrated as the same kind of victim that her male peers were. It would be hyperbolic to claim that by stressing upon the supposedly masculine features of Smith and Holiday, Burns is reusing the myth of matriarchy. His intention, rather, seems to be to just focus on the overall myth of the American prototype, which only leaves enough space for a male paradigm.

The third woman presented in detail is Ella Fitzgerald. “Like Billie Holiday,” says the narrator, “Ella Jane Fitzgerald had a bleak and troubled childhood. Her parents never married, her stepfather abused her, her mother died when she was fourteen. She dropped out of high school and ran away from the juvenile home to which she was sent” (Ep. 6, 40:32). By associating Fitzgerald’s childhood to Holiday’s, the film establishes a continuation inside the tradition of female jazz singers, which in the end all appear to be rooted in the art of Bessie Smith, who stands in the position of the myth of origin. One of the anecdotes that Burns decided was worth including was how Chick Webb initially reacted when first encountering Fitzgerald. Fitzgerald had wone first prize at a singing contest, but her physical appearance proved more powerful than her talent:

> She was supposed to get a week’s work at the theater, but the manager of the Apollo didn’t think Ella Fitzgerald was pretty enough. She returned to the streets entering amateur shows when she could. Meanwhile, Chick Webb was looking for a beautiful girl who could sing, someone who could at last bring the fame he sought in the bigger world beyond the Savoy. He sent his vocalist, Charles Linton, to scour the city, and Linton brought back Ella Fitzgerald. Webb was appalled. “You’re not putting *that* on my bandstand,” he said. But Linton threatened to quit if she wasn’t given a chance. Webb finally relented. It was the best decision he ever made. (Narrator Ep. 6, 41:58)

It is significant that Burns chose to include this anecdote, especially considering that no other story regarding a musician’s „ugliness’ is mentioned. Even Chick Webb, the same man who had initially dismissed Fitzgerald, who himself suffered of a spinal malformation and dwarfism, and who had probably been the butt of many cruel jokes, is spared from humiliation. The anecdote above could have been used to at least denounce the commercial image which women were obligated to convey in order to make it in showbusiness, but, consciously or not, what Burns seems to suggest is that it is precisely her overall package of masculine features (from her subsistence in a world of hostility to her lack of feminine beauty) which earns her a position in the jazz domain. Fitzgerald’s un-femininity is an ambivalent feature to emphasize, and it is paired with her musical talent.

Just as the feminist message remains concealed throughout the depiction of Smith, Holiday, and Fitzgerald, so is it disregarded when considering the parts that other women played in the evolution of jazz. In the last episode, Abbey Lincoln is

interviewed solely on the basis of her 1960 recording of the "Freedom Now Suite," composed by Max Roach and Oscar Brown. The revolutionary recording, in which Lincoln slowly makes an introductory transition between singing and screaming, became one of the strongest jazz protest anthems of the 1960s. At a time when black feminist consciousness was truly taking the shape of a protest movement, Burns only focuses on the binary opposition between black and white power relations, abandoning any mentions of the feminist preoccupation that was also a major issue of the Civil Rights era.

Another contemporary singer who was interviewed for the last episode was Cassandra Wilson. She is introduced as follows:

> But by the very nature of the music, no individual artist has ever been the sole focus of jazz in America. Dozens of supremely talented musicians now feed the many tributaries of jazz: Christian McBride, Lewis Nash, David Murray, Steve Coleman, Joe Lovano, Jacky Terrasson, Greg Osby, Geri Allen, Marcus Roberts, Joshua Redman, and Cassandra Wilson, who has found brand new ways of singing everything, from pop tunes and the ballads of Billie Holiday to early Delta blues. (Narrator Ep. 12, 45:46)

Once more, out of the long list of promising musicians who redirect the new waves of jazz tendencies, only Wilson and Allen are left to represent the female legacy. A short clip of Wilson performing follows this statement, enough being said about Wilson herself. Her purpose in the film is to appear as the heir of Holiday's art, and because of that, she too must be featured in the midst of masculine names.

This technique of including women by way of a list of „great men' echoes *Jazz*'s earlier portrayal of Mary Lou Williams, whose sixty-year career as an innovating pianist, composer, and arranger is reduced to two comments throughout the film. Notice the similarities not only between the two following quotes from the narrator, but also with the previous excerpt on Wilson. The first time Williams is introduced as follows: "Kansas City musicians came from everywhere. Lester Young was from Mississippi. Hot Lips Page was from Dallas. Sweets Edison, from Columbus, Ohio. Joe James, from Illinois. Mary Lou Williams, from Georgia . . . What they had in common was the blues" (Narrator Ep. 6, 21:02). Here, not only is Williams considered as just one of the men who were reinventing the aesthetic, but her role is also to emphasize the multi-territorial influences that jazz was being subjected to. This multiple rootedness is

strategical for the formation of the wider grand narrative of jazz in America, as it attempts to appeal to the ideal of democracy by referring to jazz as a tangential point where the heritages of disparate territories come together. The second and last time that Williams appears is to once again include her in a list among the musicians who were experimenting with new sounds in New York's 52nd Street: "Coleman Hawkins, Chu Berry, Charlie Christian, Don Baez, Milt Hinton, and Mary Lou Williams were all regulars at sessions [at Minton's] that sometimes went on until dawn" (Ep. 7, 9:26).

I do not mean to imply that Williams was not a part of that world. She certainly was a popular artist among both Kansas and 52nd Street musicians and she readily made herself a name inside the jazz sphere. What I would like to reiterate is Burns's use of Williams as a persona; she is deemed as an exception, acceptable only because she is able to adapt to a masculine world, by which it is implied that she must have had masculine traits in order to gain such an acknowledgement. According to Sherrie Tucker, by omitting a continued sub-narrative about how women stepped up into jazz instrumentation (for Mary Lou Williams was certainly not the first nor was she the only instrumentalist), the documentary fails to represent the growth of feminist consciousness inside the wider democratic message. "Inclusion of one woman (or jazz musician trapped in a woman's body) justifies omission of others," Tucker explains, "and inclusion on the basis of male acceptance reinforces a vision of jazz as men's natural domain" (2002: 385).

Another exemplary case in the film is the use of women to enhance the allure of jazzmen as voices of liberation and equality. In the midst of a detailed presentation of the legendary bebop trumpeter, the narrator says that "Gillespie broke all kinds of conventions. One of his trombonists was a woman, Melba Liston, whom he hired simply because he loved her sound, and found the arrangements she wrote as challenging as his own" (Ep. 9, 23:08). Here all credit is granted to Gillespie, whose intellectualism (which is repeatedly emphasized throughout several episodes) endows him with the moral responsibility to actually put to practice the preaching of equality. It is he who breaks the convention, not Liston. It is his opinion which is crucial for the inclusion of a woman, not the abilities of Liston herself. Moreover, like Mary Lou Williams, Liston was only one of the many female instrumentalists who had participated in jazz as early as the 1920s. To contest such a view, Tucker has notably revived the names of female non-singers that have been obscured by the patriarchal

discourse of jazz history: Dyer and Dolly Jones (1920s trumpet players), Valaida Snow (trumpet player), Elsie Smith (saxophonist), Jean Starr (trumpet player), Billie Rogers (trumpet player), and the all-girl ensembles like the Harlem Playgirls, Ina Ray Hutton and her Melodears, or the International Sweethearts of Rhythm (S. Tucker, "Women in Jazz"). Although there were indeed more men than women in jazz, it was really not so revolutionary a convention for Gillespie to break.

Between the depiction of women as „great men' and the use of them to further enhance male figures, it is clearly visible how jazz women continue to be manipulated historiographically in contemporary times. Another interesting observation to consider is the fact that throughout the film several male musicians (especially Armstrong and Ellington) are, as we have seen, literally proclaimed as the American version of Bach, Michelangelo, Whitman, Mozart, Picasso, or Beethoven. Not one of the women is defined in such a manner, except for Sarah Vaughan, who is said to have the vocal abilities of an opera singer. Yet no great opera singer's name is actually given in order to really solidify her talent. In contrast, being compared to an actual Bach or a Mozart bears more readily the image of Armstrong as a naturally gifted genius.

Burns's treatment of women as „great men' is controlled to such an extent that these women's personal aesthetic appears, in a way, completely asexualized. The sexual implications of Smith's moaning and groaning, or the sassy act of Fitzgerald in singing "A-Tisket A-Tasket," are missing from the film's commentaries. Similarly, the postcolonial analysis of sisterhood in blues women's lyrics remains ignored in the documentary. In another excerpt from the interview with Margo Jefferson, the writer brought up this feminist subject which inevitably failed to make the final filmic script. Speaking about Bessie Smith, Jefferson says that

> She would sing to women about the kinds of men that they'd better watch out for, you know, pinchbacks, take them away; if a man is doing this, you know, you can't trust him; if he asks, you know, if he asked to borrow money, no. Forget it. You know, they're very, they were very contemporary, too. And I think particularly for women. Sexual, sexual license, if you will. (1999: 7)[69]

[69] Citations belonging to the transcripts are indicated by the year the interview was performed and the page number of the pdf file where the quoted comments can be found. The interviewees cited in this study include Stanley Crouch, Margo Jefferson, Wynton Marsalis, and Joya Sherrill.

If we consider some of the omitted statements from the many interviews, including the above, we can more clearly appreciate that there is an ambiguous agenda behind the asexuality of female's performances as presented on the film. In the interview made to the creator himself (available on the website), Burns states that the film "is about two world wars, and a depression, about race, always race, about sex. I mean, this is the music that men and women speak to each other with. It's the mating call, the ritual of courtship" (Burns "On the Making"). Burns acknowledges the implicit, traditional sexuality inherent to African American music, yet the transcripts to the interviews reveal a profound interest in gathering information about the sexual implications of the jazzmen's music only. The interviewer repeatedly questions Joya Sherrill on Ellington's image as a „ladies man' and the sensuous aspects of his compositions (1999: 2-3); Wynton Marsalis is asked to speak about why women find Miles Davis's playing irresistible (1999: 6, 21); Margo Jefferson is also asked about Davis and about women's fixation with saxophone players (1999: 4); and Stanley Crouch is pushed to further speak about the phallic connotations of the saxophone (1997: 21). It is this emphasis on heterosexuality on the men's part that defines the sexual paradigms of the film. One can only speculate why nothing is mentioned about Smith's, Holiday's, Fitzgerald's or Vaughan's sensuous stirrings on their singing, but it would seem that this is achieved in order to once again confirm the prevailing overall message. Since jazz is a metaphor of America, and the nation itself is epitomized by the moral and social standards prescribed by men, it would only seem fit to stress the heterosexual norm that goes hand in hand with patriotic sentiment. This of course has a series of consequences: while indeed, Burns rids the female African American from the stereotypes of the sapphire or the jezebel, the methodology to do so has not been to ascertain their aesthetic expression of sexual agency, but to simply overlook sexuality altogether.

4.3.2. 'Peripheral Women' and Female Archetypes

Jazz's „great women' operate differently from the film's „peripheral women,' by which, as I said above, I refer to the women who played an important part in several of the male musicians' lives. Mothers and wives, in particular, serve to ascertain the man's position inside the decrees of the *Bildungsroman.* Sherrie Tucker argues that for the

most part, against the documentary's "jazz heroes [who] achieve greatness through male musical bonding in homosocial bands," black women are "obstacles to greatness" (2002: 378). I would like to expand on this idea by considering not only the women who are personified as an obstruction to the musician's art, but also by contemplating the more „positive' influences of some women, in accordance with the values of the film. As such, they can afford, for example, testimony to how the musician was in person, and how the racial issue affected their behavior and their personality. They can also serve to represent the need that some of these musicians had to hang on to some sort of domestic lifestyle, and they can also adopt the role of spiritual nurtures. Regardless of whether the woman's influence is positive or negative, we have to keep in mind that all these characterizations are meant to contribute to the mythical stance of the men as geniuses; their role is complementary, intended to keep the jazzman prototype from deviating from the hero monomyth.

Louis Armstrong's second and third wives best exemplify the contrast between negative and positive influences. Armstrong's second wife, Lil Hardin, was a pianist of the Chicago jazz scene. Her musical skills, however, are completely set aside in the film in order to focus on her relationship with Armstrong. "Lil Hardin," states the narrator, "was ambitious, articulate, and like Armstrong, unhappily married" (Ep. 2, 49:40). Already her character is being construed under masculine terms, but unlike the case of the „great women' who were molded into virility in order to fit the jazz hero pattern, Hardin is shaped as a determined matriarch. Although her influence on him was ultimately positive for his career, the way in which the film describes Hardin's insistence upon Armstrong's self-improvement conjures the representation of a woman whose ambitions often touched on cruelty:

> Lil urged Armstrong to strike out on his own, but he was reluctant to leave the man he still called „Mr. Joe.' He owed him a lot, he said, and wasn't sure he could make it on his own. But Lil persisted. "I don't want to be married to a second trumpet player," she told him, "I want you to play first." (Ep. 2, 50:03)

Up to this point the narrator has often emphasized on the bond between Armstrong and Joe Oliver. Their relationship has not only been just one between master and disciple, for Oliver has furthermore been insinuated to have been a father figure for the trumpet player. Hardin's persistence appears as the very matriarchal authority that the *Moynihan*

Report had described; she is the woman who tears her husband from the symbolic father. And yet in the end it is her urging which makes Armstrong abandon Chicago and go to New York to play for the Fletcher Henderson Orchestra, where he is really catapulted into fame. In the end, Armstrong, ever the hero, divorces Hardin and maintains a life-long loving bond with Oliver. He has overcome just another obstacle, one that has kept him inside the monomyth.

A wiser and more experienced Armstrong has learned to reject matriarchal influences. His third wife, Lucille, represents the symbolic counterpoint to Hardin. One of the anecdotes that Burns saw fit to include in *Jazz* was an account of how Lucille was responsible for purchasing Armstrong's first home ever. For almost a minute the viewer is given a description of how ecstatic and overjoyed Armstrong was when he realized he finally had a house. "For the rest of his life," the narrator says, "Lucille Wilson Armstrong would provide him with the stable home he'd yearned for since his boyhood in the streets of New Orleans" (Ep. 7, 50:07). Lucille's part as the provider of domesticity and the perfect, nurturing housewife not only draws a distinction with Hardin, but also with the wider frame of temptresses. „Peripheral women' like Lucille are set in contrast against the sexual atmosphere in the background of the jazz scene. Although the female vocalists and instrumentalists that I have analyzed in the previous epigraph are inserted in the masculine lifestyle and their approach to their art is asexualized, the sensuous environment surrounding jazz is not abandoned in the film. Having originated in New Orleans brothels, developed as dance music, and continued in the dim-lighted small urban clubs, jazz is produced in a context where prostitutes, dancers (from the bold lindy-hoppers to the barely dressed exotic performers of the Cotton Club) and open-minded women were in constant contact with the musicians. Lucille and the house in Queens represent the spiritual retreat from all these distractions, they endorse the family values that every American dreamer yearns for in his heart.

Domesticity and family values are also symbolized in the film through the characterization of Daisy, Duke Ellington's mother. The unalterable love and devotion that Ellington felt towards his mother all his life is continuously highlighted throughout the series. Daisy is responsible for her son's well-known respect for other women as much as for his high self-esteem. Like Lucille in Armstrong's life, Daisy remains the touchstone to which her prodigal son returns again and again in order to get back to essentials. She is the opposite of a matriarch; she represents nurturing and unconditional

support. When questioned about the relationship between mother and son, Joya Sherrill states that above all, Daisy endowed young Ellington with a strong sense of pride (1999: 1). As a strong and positive influence in his life, *Jazz* traces Ellington's fervent sentiment of racial pride (for he is characterized as the most elegant „race man' of the series) back to his mother, who even after her death has the capacity to guide her son. She is the one of casts upon him the methodology through which to counteract and battle against prejudice, and through every new account about Ellington made in the film, she remains forcefully present.

Thus Lucille's faithfulness and Daisy's role as the messenger of the self-made man code appeal to the American family values that delineate the grand narrative. *Jazz* may challenge and point out the narrowness of the nation's democratic history, but success stories in the line of Armstrong's or Ellington's serve at the same time to eternalize patriotic sentiment. Burns does indeed take on the lives of several jazzmen to denounce racism and segregation, but because jazz for him (and for the mainstream) represents the ultimate artistic expression of freedom and democracy, his message seems to be that even if there is difficulty and suffering along the path of the „great man,' the final aim, whether reached or not, has always been worth the struggle. In other words, he is not destroying the myth of the American Dream; he is not questioning its existence or the fulfillment it entails. He criticizes the fact that racism does not allow for everyone to pursue the Dream equally, but he naturally accepts that the Dream is what everybody wants, for it is truly what every man, by nature and by virtue of morality is meant to desire.

A third interesting case within the „peripheral women" is Frances Davis, Miles Davis's ex-wife. Frances does not fit neither the role of the matriarch nor that of the nurturer, yet her part is equally strategical to maintain the notion of the American Dream and the characterization of the „great man.' She is presented as an inevitable side-effect of the unequal pursuit of the American Dream which Burns, as I said above, denounces. Her testimony on Davis's difficult attitude and personal demons is revealed after the viewer has been exposed to the traumatic effects that racism and drugs had on her husband. Miles Davis is presented as one of the most complex jazzmen in the film. Brought up in the black middle-class environment, Davis abandons the norms of this culture and enters the hectic urban night life of the music. He is said to have been self-conscious about his very black skin, as well as about his boyish good looks. His

rehabilitation from heroin use is described as a spiritual rebirth, yet no amount of physical health could cure him from the damage that racism bore in his mind and soul. He becomes more acutely aware of racial discrimination when he returns from his journey to France, where he had been mingling freely with the epoch's artists and intellectuals. As the film shows, despite the fact that his new, more melodic approach to the music was being received enthusiastically by the post-bebop audience, racism unrelentingly took its toll on Davis. In the words of the narrator,

> But for all his growing fame, for all his success, Davis could never completely mask his deep insecurity, or control the anger that was so much a part of his personality. No amount of toughness could change the fact that he was still a black man in a white world. (Ep. 11, 25:56)

The climax of Davis's suffering is staged through the story of how he was brutally attacked by a New York policeman in front of Birdland, the club where he was performing that night, for no reason whatsoever. "That incident and other indignities only fueled Davis's alienation and rage," says the narrator, "he had fistfights with club owners, swore at fans who dared speak to him. His private life was just as complicated and violent" (Ep. 11, 27:14). This personal history, which is representative of the wider issue of black manhood in America, becomes the disguised explanation for his well-known mistreatment of women. Following this statement enters Frances Davis's testimony, which by now has gained a contextualized meaning:

> Miles was very possessive, I was his possession. Here I am, this ballerina who'd performed all over the world, in Broadway now, and he comes to the theater one evening in his Ferrari and says to me, "Frances, a woman should be with her man. I want you out of *West Side Story.*" I couldn't even mention another man. When I mentioned that Quincy Jones was handsome, and all of the sudden I was down for the count. I had to call the police because I thought this was going to be the end of me. It was hard. (Ep. 11, 27:34)

Frances Davis's account is manipulated so as to point to the original source of evil: racism. Therefore her story is not meant to trigger the issue of domestic abuse, but to come full circle to the borders that enclose all the experiences of the film's „great men.' The anguish and the suffering of being a black man in a white world are what hold all of the jazz heroes together as icons. It is the ultimate explanation for their character, as

much as it is for their musical innovations. Miles Davis is hence the primary victim, not the beaten Frances.

Jazz's portrayal of women mirrors traditional approaches to gender constructs within the jazz tradition. But endorsing a monolithic feminist counterargument is problematic as well, and certainly would not resolve all of the tensions articulating the male / female binarism within the wider antinomies. Some of the points that the film makes are more controversial than others, depending on the type of feminism under which it is scrutinized. Perhaps, had the female musicians not been construed under masculine patterns and molded into „feminine' monomyths instead, scholars would have felt compelled to attack the film's preconceived notions of femininity, alleging that women overcame their own obstacles by developing a strength and resilience with the same heroic degree as the men. In spite of their masculinization, Smith, Holiday, and Fitzgerald come off as self-reliant and resourceful personas. Descriptions of Holiday's toughness outweigh comments of victimhood. Although the film misses contemporary scholarly criticism that proclaims the existence of early feminist notions through a reinterpretation of the singers' approach to the lyrics and their body language, their inclusion within the hero monomyth could be viewed as an attempt to assert their agency in Burns's own way. The problem is not so much Burns's responsibility as a storyteller, but the dominating acceptance that self-reliance, persistence, and endurance are traditionally masculine traits.

In the same way, the image of women as nourishers and providers by virtue of biological determinism scandalizes heirs of Radical Feminism but is embraced by modern trends in Cultural Feminism. Within the latter group, many would argue that even though women are the natural providers and caretakers, the film is biased by sexist attitudes because it reflects that such images are functional only to the extent that they enhance the male hero's role, instead of raising the subject of sisterhood. Regarding the notion of women as obstacles, the opposite pattern could also be discerned through the Holiday story. The insistence that from childhood she was abused by men and that she became addicted to heroine because of her lover may potentially be interpreted as a monomyth within which the man is the obstacle. It is an obstacle that certainly proves

fatal in the end and which Holiday is incapable of overcoming not because the film refuses to grant her a moment of glory but because her death was in fact tragic.

Feminist critics have usually adhered to the representations of Smith, Holiday, and Fitzgerald. But little is made of the fact that Sarah Vaughan is not at all portrayed in masculine terms. The few minutes in which the film focuses on her are completely dedicated to praising her abilities:

> Sarah Vaughan saw herself as a musician rather than a singer. She was a gifted pianist in her own right, and when she closed her eyes onstage, she said, she could see and sing lines that might have been improvised on the piano. . . . Musicians lived fot her perfect pitch and rhythmic sense, her sophisticated ear for chord changes and her astonishing voice. She could sing everything, from soprano to baritone. (Narrator Ep. 11, 35:09).

Similar descriptions have been given of the abilities of Holiday and Fitzgerald, but the difference is that in the condensed allusion to Vaughan there is absolutely no attempt to „masculinize' her. By overlooking her case, scholars can more easily argue that Burns's pattern is based on the depriving of women's femininity.

I have not intended in these last remarks to make a case for *Jazz* as an objective narrative when it comes to the depiction of the women in in the music. Certainly there are comments and choices made that indicate the resilience and re-empowerment of the patriarchal discourse, and the numerous reflections that have been analyzed stand as sound evidence to support such a theory. My point has merely been to raise some issues that are to be considered for an avoidance of the same reductionism and biased approach that the patriarchal discourse is prone to. By embracing different feminist approaches and evaluating their differences, as opposed to undertaking a monolithic standpoint, we may better locate the patriarchal elements and deconstruct the type of discourse involved. An approach through the use of various feminist scopes is not so much intended to identify more patriarchal elements, but rather, to level onself with all of the film's material from as disinterested a perspective as possible, so as to adequately balance and manage the male / female binarism.

4.4. CONCLUSION

Ken Burns's *Jazz* exemplifies the manner by which mythistory has found the way to germinate within contemporary culture, and it has done so by using the most popular medium for the channeling of information: television. A marketing agreement with General Motors led to the publicizing of the film before the initial airing on PBS, so that "virtually every major newspaper, family magazine, webzine, and radio and television network in America displayed feature articles on the series in the days and weeks leading up to its broadcast" (Pond 2003: 13). Even if for a short while, jazz became a topic of interest at a nation-wide scale (Pond estimates that about thirteen million viewers tuned in for the first episode) and the marketing campaign backing up the documentary launched about thirty-five thousand *Jazz*-related products. Jazz album sales incremented in an unprecedented manner, and Burns partnered with Amazon.com for the merchandising of his products, including the DVD and VHS collections, printed versions of the film (which became national bestsellers), and a CD anthology.

The amount of scholarly criticism and journal reviews is proportional to the impact that the documentary had in popular culture. It is nearly impossible not to find references to *Jazz* in jazz-related publications from the fields of cultural studies since 2001. Fundamentally, jazz was brought back into discussions about the culture industry. Catherine Gunther Kodat (2003) has recuperated some of Theodor Adorno's arguments in "On Jazz" (1936) to posit the extent to which the jazz canon is intrinsically bound to a marketing niche, and uses *Jazz* as the prime example of the capitalist machinery involved.

Reviewing a survey of the criticism that *Jazz* has received, it appears that the controversy is in great part stirred because of the film's potential as an educational tool. In the view of jazz specialists, it is particularly troubling that millions of viewers have become recipients of what they deem as a deeply distorted narrative of the music. The Great Man Theory does not necessarily go unnoticed by the average viewer; but other subtleties that range from an exaggerated emphasis on racial essentialism to an inadequate use of anecdotes and information may mislead the viewer from what jazz is *actually* about. As Kodat explains, "most Americans are simply not in a position to assess the various claims of musical greatness, originality, and authenticity that have been invoked in shaping the new jazz canon" (2003: 16). Jazz specialists find, for the

most part, the series to be unreliable, and Burns, as the principal author, „irresponsible,' for lack of a better term. Because he had access to the media, many felt that, perhaps, the opportunity to set the record straight about jazz music and jazz history was lost: Burns had chosen to perpetuate the type of narrative that had always haunted the music's history and the type of canon that had been institutionalized by „Jazz at the Lincoln Center.'

On the whole, we find ourselves addressing the „health' of mythistory, the moral implications of conveying a certain truth. When critics discredit the documentary they are invalidating its authenticity and „vulnerizing' its authoritative quality on the basis of Burns's and the talking heads' flaunting and excesses in their use of poetic license. But Burns's authorial intent has never been to please an audience of select specialists; his target viewers, in all of his films (from *The Civil War* to *Baseball*), have always been the average American seeking to get a glimpse of the history of a certain symbol of Americanness. Gary Edgerton has labeled Burns as a "popular historian" as opposed to a professional one, not only because he lacks an academic background in the fields of history and historiography, but mainly because he "uses the power and influence of film to reach well beyond a scholarly audience with his television histories" (2002: 16). Recalling McNeill's deliberations, we are reminded that "all truths are general" and that "total reproduction of experience is impossible and undesirable" (1986: 18). Burns deeply perceives the implications of adhering to the fixed meanings of the documents – loss of entertainment value, substantial disinterest on the part of the average viewer, and more importantly, the impossibility of supplying his narrative with universal coherence.

In a personal interview with Edgerton, Burns reveals his awareness of the extent to which any given material voicing a moment in history can be manipulated, used for alternative deictic associations. The degree of malleability depends on the type of narrative the historian seeks to convey, metonymy and metaphor being the inductive and deductive processes that the historian works with. If a single event, a photograph, a statement, a film clip (that is, the documents) is worth consideration it is because of its potential to expand into a wider truth. From its limited number of visual, auditory, or conceptual signs stems a larger world order with universal applicability. What critics would perhaps consider an abuse of authorship is what Burns, more euphemistically, regards as the modus operandi of the storytelling of history. Burns explains that

> Poetic license is the razor's edge between fraud and art that we ride all the time. You have to shorten, you have to take shortcuts, you have to abbreviate, you have to sort of make do with, you have to sometimes go with something that's less critically truthful imagery-wise because it does an ultimately better job of telling the larger truth. (Qtd. Edgerton 2002: 19)

By viewing Burns more specifically as a mythistorian, rather than the more vaporous category of popular historian, we may better comprehend the deictic dynamics between signs and truth and the balance between fraud and truth, which are the bricks underlying the *Bildung.*

In a way, it seems particularly troubling that Burns, being aware of the implications of an excessive use of poetic license, continues to embrace what he knows not to be completely factual. Yet what is so utterly wrong or immoral in developing a narrative that takes into account how things happened as much as how things are believed to have happened when we consider the target audience? What is so disturbing in attempting not to alienate the viewer from the narrative by addressing and appealing to concepts and symbols bound to the world knowledge of the average spectator? African American culture itself, as we have seen, is built on a rich array of rhetorical devices bordering on fraud: lies, toasts, and signifying are celebrated as proof of the organic method by which orality supplies blackness with social and aesthetic identity. Why should a history directed towards a general audience dispense from the elements that enable the connection between viewers and the topic, providing Americans with a sense of a historical, collective identity? I propose two final arguments for further food for thought:

Firstly, despite the fact that Burns neglects issues that have been central to contemporary jazz scholars, and despite the fact that he re-empowers the Great Man Theory at the expense of a more pluralistic historiographic method, *Jazz* has excelled in accomplishing what it was created to do: entertain and educate. The film as a whole stands as a sort of jazz and American history appreciation class, and this is not a negligible contribution. Those who feel allured to the music can from thereon move from the mythistory to the more austere, and perhaps demanding, histories strictly based on fact, develop a critical outlook and grow to become specialists. I cannot but help agree with Edgerton in his conclusions about Burns's work at a practical level. He writes that "Ken Burns's television histories can be utilized as an engaging and effective pedagogical aid when paired with an assortment of related scholarly readings as well as

supplemented with thorough class discussions about the ways in which Burns actually constructs these television histories" (2002: 21).

Secondly, for all its faults, by engaging with mythistory, *Jazz* takes into consideration what is overlooked by many other current historians of the music: that hearsay, anecdotes, hyperbolization, reductionism, illusion, simplification and naturalization of essences are themselves not only an intricate part of the traditional, canonical narrative of which today's academia is highly critical, but also of the jazz sphere itself. Crow's celebration of the anecdote, for instance, is a tribute to the cornucopia of oral distortions through which social codes are reinforced. Gates refers to jazz and other characteristically black forms of music, such as rap, as rich sites for the development of rhetorical flaunting. Viewed in this scope, *Jazz* is being honest to the culture that it is dealing with, and perseveres in its belief that "in order to know who a group was, one must take seriously who that group thought they were" (Mali 2003: 4). Even if critics are displeased by the overwhelming influence of the canon in the content of the narrative, the mythistorical narrative, as an arrangement and pattern, is perhaps the most faithful form of historiography that jazz could ever have.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

Jazz and the blues idiom have always been highly protean aesthetics when it comes to the field of exegesis, both at a musical and at a cultural level. Jazz writing and narrative could not have been otherwise, and the present dissertation in no way attempts to suggest that the discussion about what jazz is and what it represents within American culture is anywhere near completion. If anything, this study has aimed to expose not only just how richly textured the music is, but how elaborate the literary laquer into which it translates can be.

By placing myth at the forefront of the discussion, I have aimed to filter out what contradictions, controversies, and allegories jazz has inspired in its short history. In Part 1 I presented an overview of jazz criticism and journalism with the object of introducing the reader unacquainted with the field of jazz studies into the principal issues governing the discourse. I sketched the prevalent dichotomies and binarisms that constitute the embryo of myth-making, and traced their development and their significance within the academia until the emergence of New Jazz Studies, where I hope

this dissertation may find its niche. I discussed five recent works dealing directly with the subject of myth so as to present the reader with representative analytical processes through which jazz and myth have found a common ground. Neil Leonard, Peter Townsend, Tony Whyton, Randall Sandke, and Kabir Sehgal brilliantly illustrate the multiple manners by which jazz mythography and mythopoeia remain vivid and relevant topics. The anthropological scope undertaken by Leonard contrasts greatly with Townsend's deconstructionism, an angle that most likely inspired the deciphering technique applied by Whyton and Sandke within their own individual areas. Relieving himself from the mythographic mission, Sehgal's work stands out for its undisguised commitment to mythopoeia and the strengthening of the jazz-as-democracy metaphor. In discussing these pieces, I attempted to carve out a space for my own research, justifying its inherent novelty and its coherence and cohesiveness within contemporary critical trends.

Neither my use of Barthes and Gates, nor my consideration of Burns's *Jazz*, are new contributions to the matter. I explained that Barthes's mystification (although at a more surface level than I believe to have been my own enterprise), had been one of the frameworks through which Townsend and Whyton had conducted part of their own research. Signifyin(g) Theory, I also explained, has been a favorite critical tool for New Jazz scholars ranging from cultural theorists to culturally-oriented musicologists, and a decade after its first airing, the film *Jazz* notoriously continues to maintain a central position within discussions about authority, appropriation, and imitation in the jazz sphere.

I have, nonetheless, recycled and elaborated on these theories and this subject matter to provide critical commentary on the function of myth within jazz literature and narrative. As modes of exegesis, Barthes's mystification, Signifyin(g) Theory and mythistory are not intended to rule out one another; rather, what I have attempted to convey by juxtaposing them in three separate sections, is the impression that jazz is not just a music, but a cultural construct reflective of the complicated racial, sexual, and social politics of twentieth and twenty-first-century America, and that as such, it stands as a symbol highly susceptible to the discourse of myth-making.

In Part 2, I deconstructed the primitivist myth by surveying the appearance of Barthes's rhetorical devices of mystification in early jazz journalism, criticism, and other forms indicating the reception of jazz. In assessing the manner by which

inoculation, the privation of history, identification, tautology, neither-norism, the quantification of quality, and the statement of fact present a depoliticized and naturalized image of jazz and black culture, I emphasized along the way on the basic antinomies that have haunted the music from its beginnings: black / white, high art / entertainment, male / female, authenticity / commercialism, experimentation / imitation, formal training / informal training, oppressor / oppressed etc. As a follow-up, I analyzed Carl Van Vechten's *Nigger Heaven* to illustrate the methods through which many of these binarisms and the encompassing primitivist myth to which they answer come to life in fictional form. I also referred to the controversies that Van Vechten himself brought on as a Harlem socialite, so as to elucidate the manner whereupon authenticity and sincerity remain vital issues in the consideration of jazz from an interracial perspective.

From the Harlemania of which Van Vechten served as prime ambassador and the primitivist myth that permeated his writing, I then turned to the hipster stance of Mezz Mezzrow and John Clellon Holmes. I continued to address the topic of jazz racial „miscegenation' by presenting the historical bonds between negritude and Jewishness, and argued that, although to a much minor extent, the White Negro phenomenon continued to perpetuate certain mystified beliefs of the racial „other.' Among other considerations, Mezzrow's inferiority complex on account of his skin color and heritage reveals a set of beliefs about the characteristics of black culture as much as the implications of blackness that indulge in stereotypical appreciations. As well-intended as Mezzrow was, and despite the fact that his descriptions of jazz rituals are of the most colorful accounts of the musical rites that we have today, he in some level failed to overcome the stigma of race. Mezzrow's resolution of the black / white dichotomy is unlike that of Van Vechten, who delights in the aestheticist exploitation of race as an aesthetic pretext; what Mezzrow personifies is the artist's personal demons when confronting imitation and experimentation. Because he viewed everything from behind the racial veil, he found it distressful to come to terms with himself and the music he so ardently celebrated. His transition from praising the culturally-specific to the universal aspect of the blues idiom appears as an effort to redeem himself rather than a quest to authenticate the absolute values of the music.

Mezzrow's eulogizing of blackness stands as a preview of what has become one of the soundest attacks against the Beat Generation, particularly against Jack Kerouac. I

explained how Jon Panish has accused the Beats of an excessive penchant towards romanticism, for their understanding of blackness was one in which the de-historicizing and depoliticizing characteristic of Barthean mystification was palpable. In an effort to not equate the work of Kerouac to that of Holmes, however, I analyzed the authorship of *The Horn* by addressing the implications of the jazz hero monomyth. As Holmes construes his fictional subjects as mostly tragic figures, so does he recreate Western rituals and myths in a manner that, to the view of some, may be deemed inaccurate. Holmes's mergence of blackness within universal mythical paradigms overlooks, in a sense, the specifically black, and so again the inoculation of white supremacy within black culture takes shape.

In Part 3 I focused on the mythopoeic potential of Signifyin(g) Theory to analyze the blues-based work of Alice Walker, Ralph Ellison, and Albert Murray. Signifyin(g) Theory enables a comprehension of African American aesthetics that resists the inoculation of Euro American influence, and that allows for the consolidation of the jazz tradition within strictly Afro-American codes. By emphasizing on the orality inherent to black culture, the type of rhetoric and semiotic system which to a large extent is part of the communal identity, Gates was able to develop a critical framework that echoed Eliot's mythical method, and simultaneously sustain the blues idiom as an organic vessel recreating many of the rituals associated to the Esu myths. In *The Color Purple*, Walker stretches the significance of the blues as a form of double-voicedness beyond the masculinist scope; her womanist philosophy launches the representation of blues women as the juxtaposers of binarisms, subverting along the way the up-down hierarchies under which they operated. Such mythopoeic elaborations have paved the way for the interpretation of 1920s classic blues singers as spokeswomen and practitioners of contemporary feminism, bringing together features that are contained in, but not limited to, black feminism, Radical Feminism, and Cultural Feminism.

Ralph Ellison and Albert Murray, on the other hand, exalt the blues idiom for its heroic qualities and its adherence to the male-centered monomyth. Construed as an Elizabethan double-voiced character, the Louis Armstrong of Ellison's *Invisible Man* becomes the shaman incarnate, the figure of wisdom in whose riddle lies the key to the hero's progression into another existential dimension. By refusing to submit to realism and the exigencies of the protest novel and providing these hybrid (African American and European) motifs instead, Ellison found himself battling against the interests and

attacks purported by white critics and the black intelligentsia. Ellison's conception of the blues as a tragicomic aesthetic was elaborated on by Albert Murray, and through his essays and his novel, *Train Whistle Guitar*, the idiom is deconstructed into its signifying rituals. The jazz tradition, based on elaboration, extension, and refinement, emerges in the work of Murray as a construct mirroring the dynamics of antagonistic cooperation characteristic of the epic genre. Thus, contrary to the molding of jazz prototypes and archetypes under the demands of tragedy (as in the case of Holmes), Ellison and Murray become the first to advocate that jazz can be encoded within universal mythic paradigms without sacrificing the culturally-specific aspects. It is not a matter of manipulating blackness so as to fit the archetypal categories of Eurocentric myth; what Ellison and Murray suggest is that within the vernacular, that is, within the blues idiom, the molding of chaos into cosmos that universal myth is prone to is already there. By arguing that the blues is an idiom of epic proportions perpetually reflecting the fight against entropy and chthonic forces, they manage to destroy many of the previous appreciations of jazz that were immersed in the primitivist myth. Moreover, their accomplishment is not one that should necessarily be viewed as a reactionary response: rather than conceiving black letters as a rhetoric intended to contravene racist assumptions (that is, rather than developing a literature in accordance to what white supremacy already expects), they strive to create an aesthetic that rises above social complaint and demand. In other words, and in accordance with Kenneth Burke, they stylize their writing by creating the rules of the game: with the blues idiom as the preferential metaphor to represent the black individual's "equipment for living," black culture is found to reflect the same values and interests of the great American and Western myths.

Lastly, in Part 4, I have used mythistory as the critical framework of Burns's documentary in order to expose how myth continues to germinate within contemporary jazz narrative, even within such a demanding field as historiography. Because of the very nature of the genre, it is not surprising for myth to readily develop within journalism, fiction, or autobiography; but historiography often demands a set of responsibilities that are not necessarily imperative for journalists or fiction writers. Burns's film and the response it received exemplify the age-old reliance on myth for the consolidation of a cultural identity. From as far back as Thucydides and Herodotus, and probably even further, the role of the historian is one that has had to dwell within such

relative issues as truth and authenticity, the resulting pattern being one that is either inclined towards the facts of the documents or towards reflecting the truth of how history is lived. Because of the oral character that so much defines and is a part of the jazz sphere, anecdotes, I have argued, can be regarded as adequate substitutes to mythical narrations. Anecdotes retain much of the same qualities of myths; they not only articulate microcosms structured around the essential binarisms of jazz, providing a sense of order and cohesion within the wider narrative, but they are moreover nurtured by the same rhetoric that characterizes myth: metaphor, metonymy, hyperbole, ellipsis, etc. The audiovisual syntax within which the anecdotes of *Jazz* operate supports the mythical potential of the small narratives, and organically contributes to the wider jazz-as-democracy-metaphor. Combined with anecdotes and in view of the male-centered pattern that the documentary favors, the Great Man Theory reveals its validity as a form of mythistory. The fact that the Great Man Theory stands at the epicenter of the documentary proves that although much progress has been made in terms of the acceptance of jazz as a high art, the slow yet progressive eradication of the primitivist myth, and the canonization of jazz pieces, the historiographic method in itself has not evolved much. At least when it comes to the development of a history for non-musicians as the popular, target audience, the Great Man Theory continues to be the framework of choice.

It has been necessary to address jazz mythography and mythopoeia from three different standpoints in order to unearth the various interpretative possibilities that jazz and the blues idiom afford. To have limited this dissertation to a Barthean analysis would have produced a reductive study, where only the primitivist myth and the concern over white hegemony would have appeared as the prevalent issues of the jazz discourse. Similarly, a sole analysis through Signifyin(g) Theory would have overlooked the significance of jazz within white culture, and would have, in many ways, neglected the extent to which Walker's, Ellison's and Murray's texts reinvented stereotypes and destroyed racist assumptions about African American culture. Finally, a mere study on the weight of mythistory within jazz would, in great part, have missed out the interpretative deviations into which jazz writers have steered in its short history. An adequate analysis of the myth-making potential of *Jazz* requires, I believe, an intimate knowledge of the ideology of Ralph Ellison and Albert Murray as much as it requires a previus scrutiny of the bourgeois appropriation of the music, and of the

critical material that is being filtered out of the narrative – for instance, the feminist perspective. I explained in the Introduction that I have trouble in identifying whether it was the selected corpus which demanded the application of these mythographic frameworks or the other way around, and that, most likely, it was the result of both. After what I consider to have been a series of analysis and interpretations performed with the utmost care to comply with the demands of the mythographic form at hand, I can only conclude that to approach jazz from yet another mythographic scope can continue to raise deep issues about the cultural significance of the music. I hope that this work may aid those future New Jazz scholars whose interests, like my own, have swayed towards the study of myth in jazz writing.

In the conclusion to Part 2 I brought up the topic of jazz fiction anthologies by referring to an article by Ryan Jervin, in which he rigorously surveyed the likely reasons why early jazz writing had been increasingly pushed away from the literary canon. Jervin suggested that the stereotypical notions of negritude to which these early Euro American writers obeyed were a cultural embarrassment today. Indeed, after having performed an in-depth analysis through the Barthean framework, these attempts to further empower the white hegemony and to deprive blacks of their history become more visible. Today's jazz canon has been greatly fostered by Ellison, Murray and Crouch, and has succeeded in delineating jazz as a metaphor of American optimism, the self-made man ethic, and the heroic dynamics resulting from the paradigms of national humor and the national tragedy. It has, without question, empowered black culture and black aesthetics, and has found viable ways through which to institutionalize jazz within the United States mainstream interests. And yet this canon, as we have seen through the criticism directed against Burns or against Marsalis, is beginning to topple in many respects. Many New Jazz scholars, I mentioned in Part 1, have found in the deconstruction of the jazz canon the object of their research, as they begin to distinguish the menacing effects of its power. Perceived as a politicized structure, the jazz canon is following a path not unlike that of the Western literary canon, a path which Harold Bloom described as follows:

> Ideological defenses of the Western Canon are pernicious in regard to aesthetic values as the onslaught of attackers who seek to destroy the Canon or "open it up," as they proclaim. . . . Those who oppose the Canon insist that there is always an ideology involved in canon formation; indeed, they go farther and speak of the ideology *of* canon formation, suggesting that to make a canon (or to perpetuate one) is an ideological act *in itself*. (1995: 21)

The canon, which is built upon a selection of works, cannot, by the very nature of pattern-formation, avoid a mythistorical outtake. Today's canon, I argued in Part 1, has been able to naturalize most of the contradictions that had, in earlier decades, caused a breach in the history of jazz. The transition from New Orleans jazz to swing and later to bop is viewed logically (although it should be mentioned that at least in the canon proposed by Burns and „Jazz at the Lincoln Center,' the avant-garde is given little recognition as a valid movement within jazz history), and the political discourse under which such shifts were originally surveyed has passed on to become anecdotical in itself, frozen and mystified through the mask of time. As jazz has gained increasing acceptance in the academia, this canon has exposed its cracks, and in the interest of those who do not see their cultural identity adequately reflected within its discourse, it is progressively being torn apart, regardless of the consequences that the disposing of myth may have over the art form itself.

In terms of the jazz literature canon, I venture to speculate that if it does follow the same pattern that jazz music is facing today, it will do so at a slower pace. The urgency with which scholars seem to strive to find the authentic meaning of jazz is, I belive, much milder in the case of literary scholars. Of course many New Jazz scholars with a background in literary or cultural studies seem invested in the deconstruction of the contemporary myths that sustain the jazz canon; but except for a handful of scholars (including Jervin, Panish, or Townsend), their concern is mainly about the salvaging of the music, not of the alternative literary canons. This is not to say that there is no endeavor to shape or deconstruct the literary canon (Jervin's claims that anthologies are devoid of early jazz fiction, especially by whites, could, in the eyes of many, be viewed as a triumph of the current canon); what I suggest is that whereas the reactions against the jazz canon are more vocal, either through writing or open forums and discussions, broad reactions against a literary canon reigned by Ellison, Murray, Crouch, Sterling A. Brown, Baraka, Walker, August Wilson, etc., are still to come. The fact that the jazz literary canon exalts black writers over white ones is, for the most part, an accepted and

welcomed premise. What Jervin argues is not that white writers should be placed as equals to their black counterparts, but that to neglect their presence within anthologies is detrimental to the history of jazz, for their absence only impoverishes and simplifies what complex matters have always been concomitant to jazz writing.

The color of jazz is still a sensitive subject, and fortunately or unfortunately it is still the key issue from which to raise the topics of appropriation, ownership, authenticity, and authority. At a time when color-blind ethics seemed to be the norm in 1990s middle-class America, race continued to be ardently discussed in the jazz sphere. Andre Craddock-Willis's transcription of the public debate between Wynton Marsalis and James Lincoln Collier at the Lincoln Center on August 7, 1994, illustrates the extent to which charges against racism are readily used by experts to discredit one another. As Craddock-Willis remembers,

> Wynton Marsalis arrived very well prepared. He came to talk music. He wanted to analyze musical statements from Collier's Ellington and Armstrong books, to force Collier to admit them as mistakes, and get him to print them as corrections in future editions. Collier, meanwhile, wanted Marsalis to answer to various charges made against the Lincoln Center Jazz Program, ranging from nepotism to racism to hostility to free jazz. (Marsalis, Collier, and Craddock-Willis 1995: 142)

What follows is a discussion virtually bordering on sensationalism throughout, of which we may deduce (at least on the basis of Collier's frequent disapproving remarks on the audience's jeering against his statements) that Marsalis came out the victor. I have selected the following excerpts for the sole purpose to show the reader, in these final remarks, the extent to which race can turn from being a topic of discussion to a more or less subtle form to bring one's adversary into disrepute. The first excerpt is on account of Collier's claim that Ellington was not much of a reader nor an intellectual, a statement which Marsalis finds offensive:

> **James Lincoln Collier:** I'll tell you I have been called a racist. I've been called all the worst kinds of names in the press and it is primarily because I tried to point out some of these truths about some of these musicians. Now you say that I shouldn't say those things about Duke. Are you saying I shouldn't say them about Duke because they're not true, or are you saying I shouldn't be saying them about Duke because we shouldn't say anything nasty about Duke Ellington?

> **Wynton Marsalis:** Well, I'm not only saying that they're not true. See, I'm a musician. I have read *Music Is My Mistress* and many books on Duke Ellington. I've gone to school. I learned how how to read when I was five or six years old.
> **JLC:** Now, let's cut that out.
> **WM:** No, I have to – I'm sorry for having that tone Mr. Collier, but in this book you made it out that Duke Ellington never read. (Marsalis, Collier, and Craddock-Willis 1995: 154-155)

In another instance, Collier bluntly attacks Marsalis for what he perceives to be a racially-biased stance in his selection of programs at „Jazz at the Lincoln Center,' and Marsalis turns the discussion around:

> **JLC:** You've never done anything on Bix Beiderbecke, who was the most influential figure after Armstrong in the 1920s and 1930s. Why, why are these people not being covered when you're covering people who are black who are not nearly as significant as some of the whites who have been left out?
> **WM:** Okay, that's a good question and I'm going to answer it for you very slowly. And I want everybody to hear this answer because race is the crucible of our entire nation. Everything comes down to that. All through your books, Mr. Collier, you make reference to "middle class blacks," "ignorant negroes"….
> **JLC:** Wait a minute, that is grossly unfair.
> **WM:** Okay, wait a second, I can find it. "He was, remember, short on self confidence. New Orleans was home. New Orleans was also a little off the main traveled road and the ghetto blacks there were ill educated and unsophisticated. Middle class he would not be, in his heart would never be," and so on – I have a big list of them, Mr. Collier . . . (Marsalis, Collier, and Craddock-Willis 1995: 163)

In spite of the fact that both speakers boldy construct their arguments around each other's personal statements, display of authorship, or professional choices, the debate is one that echoes all too well what wounds jazz (or more accurately, America at large) has yet to heal. Jazz is an unavoidably racially-based issue, ever more so than sexual, (although a lot of progress has been made in this regard, as I have attempted to show in Parts 3 and 4) and by extension, it is a highly politicized discursive site, whether this was at the time when white hegemony predominated with its primitivist assumptions or during the golden era of today's jazz canon.

I end these closing remarks with a few personal notes about my own position, a position which in a sense is highly anti-climactic. Firstly, my perspective as a Spanish

woman with a background in feminist literature is, I hope, as much a small contribution to the continuation towards the unearthing of a much-silenced interpretation of the jazz culture as it is a homage to those feminist scholars that have preceded and inspired me: Alice Walker, Angela Davis, Sherrie Tucker, Marybeth Hamilton, Daphne Duval Harrison, and Hazel Carby. In the spirit of this dissertation, I do not attempt to convey that the racial and/or cultural barrier distancing me from these women is non-existent. I am obliged to state, however, that it is their work which has allowed me (and I am sure, the handful of other female New Jazz scholars worldwide) to relate to the music at an unprecedented level. Feminist scopes on jazz culture still pale in comparison to the overwhelming number of men working from a male-centered point of view, yet the discipline keeps growing at a slow, but steady pace.

Secondly, politicized as the jazz discourse and jazz mythopoeia are, I have no prescriptive contribution regarding whether the jazz or jazz literary canon is following an adequate path – that towards deconstructionism. On the one hand I find myself reacting against canons of any sort on the basis that power necessarily implies the subdual of others, and that their erasure from history and from literature complies little with what I believe to be the main purpose of any aesthetic – to be open, and be the mouthpiece of anybody and everybody, regardless of race, gender, or social status. Art, I strongly sustain, must by necessity imply sociopolitical commentary and commit to moral principles directed against exclusivity. On the other hand, I am inclined to defend those narratives that foster the symbols of the depths of humanity, those that reduce reality to the counterstatement of forces, and believe that mythic metaphors successfully reach beyond what mere words always fall short of conveying. For all their faults and biased selections, I embrace the current jazz and jazz literature canons because I believe that their representative „great men,' whether these be musicians or writers, excell in personifying or in articulating how universal matters and predicaments can translate into individual experience. My inability to wholly position myself at either side is also aided by the fact that despite extensive reading and writing on the subject, I have too much respect for jazz and blues musicians and the discipline required to master their craft to deem myself the type of authority to have the final word on the matter, even in my own dissertation.

My respect for these musicians and for the music itself, however, does not prevent me from ascertaining the academic necessity for New Jazz Studies scholars to

continue their research and explore the intricacies underlying the jazz and blues-idiomatic culture. While I understand many musicologists' remarks against the discipline for its frequent dismissal (whether on the grounds of ignorance or irrelevancy) of musical analyses, I believe that insight stemming from the fields of humanities only enriches our understanding of jazz as an aesthetic and as a cultural construct. Separate as these positions may have been in the past, I believe that to deem them as incompatible in the future would be highly detrimental for the music and would ultimately narrow the path towards making jazz accessible to new generations. Strict musicological analysis, I am convinced, is indispensable, yet a vast part of the legacy of jazz history is lost if cultural commentary is exclusively relegated to musicologists. It has been thanks to New Jazz scholars that invaluable jazz and blues-related material has been rescued from the obliteration of forgetfulness. Jazz writing, film clips, interviews, photographs, album covers, etc. have become central for a reinterpretation of the dialectical workings between the music and its reflection and expression within other semiotic mediums. I hope that on the whole, this dissertation may add towards the development of New Jazz Studies.

Perhaps the solution to conceiving musicology and New Jazz Studies as complementary and supplementary fields lies in the understanding that not one text can ever contain the entirety of the „truth' of jazz, and that the body of jazz literature and studies must be regarded, much like the mythical method, as works in time-defying dialogue and negotiation. Combined, musicology and New Jazz Studies hold the key to ensure that this dialogue shall never perish.

REFERENCES

Abrahams, Roger D. 2009 (1964): *Deep Down in the Jungle. Black American Folklore from the Streets in Philadelphia.* Piscataway, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers.

Achebe, Chinua 1990: *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays.* New York: Doubleday Books.

Adorno, Theodor W. 2004 (1958): *Philosophy of Modern Music.* Trans. Anne G. Mitchell and Wesley V. Blomster. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group.

Ake, David 1998: "Re-Masculating Jazz: Ornette Coleman, „Lonely Woman,' and the New York Jazz Scene in the Late 1950s." *American Music* 16.1 (Spring Issue): 25-44.

Albertson, Chris 2003 (1972): *Bessie.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Anderson, Paul Allen 2005: "Ralph Ellison's Musical Lessons." *The Cambridge Companion to Ralph Ellison.* Ed. Ross Posnock. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 82-103.

Anonym. 2002 (*Literary Digest*, 1919): "The Appeal of the Primitive Jazz." *Jazz in Print (1856-1929). An Anthology of Selected Early Readings in Jazz History.* Ed. Karl Koenig. New York: Pendragon Press. 119-120.

Anonym. (*New York Times*, 1921). "Attacks Immoral Art. Dr. Van Dyke also Tells Educators that Demon Invented Jazz." <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=FB0711FF385810738DDDA10A94DA405B818EF1D3> (Accessed January 7, 2011)

Anonym. 2002 (*The Musical Courier*, 1900): "Ragtime Communication." *Jazz in Print (1856-1929).* Ed. Karl Koenig. *An Anthology of Selected Early Readings in Jazz History.* New York: Pendragon Press. 60-61.

Ansermet, Ernest 2004 (1919): "On a Negro Orchestra." *Modernism and Music. An Anthology of Sources.* Ed. Daniel Albright. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 368-373.

Antheil, George 2004 (1919): "The Negro on the Spiral, or A Method of Negro Music." *Modernism and Music. An Anthology of Sources.* Ed. Daniel Albright. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 390-398.

Armstrong, Louis 1993 (1936): *Swing that Music.* New York: Da Capo Press.

---. 2004 (1947): "Black and Blue." *The Essential Armstrong.* Audio CD. CD 1: Track 14. Sony.

Apollinaire, Guillaume 2004 (1913): *The Cubist Painters.* Trans. Peter Read. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Appel, Alfred, Jr. 2004: *Jazz Modernism. From Ellington and Armstrong to Matisse and Joyce.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Austin, Cecil. 2004 (1925): "Jazz." *Jazz: A Century of Change –Readings and New Essays.* Ed. Lewis Porter. Belmont, California: Wadsworth Group. 146-147.

Baldwin, James 1984 (1955): *Notes of a Native Son.* Boston: Beacon Press.

Balliett, Whitney 2005 (1986): *American Musicians II. Seventy-one Portraits in Jazz.* Jackson: University of Mississippi Press.

Baker, Houston A.,Jr. 1984: *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Baraka, Amiri (LeRoi Jones) 2003 (1964): *Dutchman. The Norton Anthology of American Literature.* Vol. E. Ed. Julia Reidhead. New York: Norton & Company. 2301-2314.

---. 2002 (1963): *Blues People. Negro Music in White America.* New York: Perennial.

---. 1998 (1963): "Jazz and the White Critic." *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture.* Ed. Robert G. O'Meally. New York: Columbia University Press. 137-142.

Barry, Kathleen 1973: "West Coast Conference: Not Purely Academic." *Off Our Backs* (*oob*) 3.10: 24-25.

Barthes, Roland 1977: *Image – Music – Text.* Trans. Stephen Heath. London: Fontana Press.

---. 1972 (1957): *Mythologies.* Trans. Annette Lavers. New York: Hill and Wang.

Bauer, Marion 2004 (1924): "L'Influence du „Jazz Band.'" *Jazz: A Century of Change – Readings and New Essays.* Ed. Lewis Porter. Trans. Lewis Porter. Belmont, California: Wadsworth Group. 131.

Bayle, Pierre 2000 (1972): "From *The Dictionary Historical and Critical.*" *The Rise of Modern Mythology (1680-1860).* Eds. Burton Feldman and Robert D. Richardson, Jr. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 22-24.

Bell, Clive 2001 (1921): "Plus de Jazz!" *Riffs and Choruses. A New Jazz Anthology.* Ed. Andrew Clark. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group. 40-42.

Berendt, Joachim 2005 (1953): *El jazz: De Nueva Orleans a los años ochenta.* Trans. Jas Reuter, Juan José Utrilla, Julio Colón Gómez. Madrid: Fondo de Cultura Económica.

Berger, Morroe 1947: "Jazz: Resistance to the Diffusion of a Culture Pattern." *The Journal of Negro History* 32.4. 461-494.

Bernard, Emily 2001: Introduction. ***Remember Me to Harlem: The Letters of Langston Hughes and Carl Van Vechten.*** Ed. Emily Bernard. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. xiii-xxvii.

Blake, Susan L. (1986). "Ritual and Rationalization: Black Folklore in the Works of Ralph Ellison." ***Modern Critical Views: Ralph Ellison.*** Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House Publishers. 77-99.

Blesh, Rudi 1946: ***Shining Trumpets.*** New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Bloom, Harold 1995 (1994): ***The Western Canon.*** New York: Riverhead Books.

Bodkin, Maud 1958: ***Archetypal Patterns in Poetry: Psychological Studies of Imagination.*** New York: Vintage Books.

Borst, Allan G. 2009: "Signifyin(g) Afro-Orientalism: The Jazz-Addict Subculture in *Nigger Heaven* and *Home to Harlem.*" *Modernism / Modernity* 16.4: 685-707.

Brandt, Max 1995 (1993): "The Respectable Art of Woodshedding in World Music." ***Barbershopping. Musical and Social Harmony.*** Ed. Max Kaplan. 33-54.

Brothers, Thomas 2006: *Louis Armstrong's New Orleans.* New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Brown, Lee B. 2002: "Jazz: America's Classical Music?" *Philosophy and Literature* 26: 157-172.

Brown, Sterling A. 1995 (1932): "Ma Rainey." ***The Portable Harlem Renaissance Reader.*** Ed. David Levering Lewis. New York: Viking Penguin. 232-234.

Bryant, Jerry H. 2003: ***Born in a Mighty Bad Land: The Violent Man in African American Folklore and Fiction.*** Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press.

Burke, Kenneth 1973 (1941): ***The Philosophy of Literary Form.*** Berkeley: University of California Press.

---. 1966: ***Language as Symbolic Action. Essays on Life, Literature, and Method.*** Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Burns, Ken. "On the Making of *Jazz*." <http://www.pbs.org/jazz/about/about_behind_the_scenes.htm> (Accessed June 2, 2011)

Butler, David 2002: ***Jazz Noir: Listening to Music from Phantom Lady to The Last Seduction.*** Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Group.

Campbell, James 2001 (1999): *This Is the Beat Generation. New York, San Francisco, Paris.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Campbell, Joseph 1973 (1949): *The Hero with a Thousand Faces.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Campbell, Kermit E. 2005: *Gettin' Our Groove On: Rhetoric, Language, and Literacy for the Hip Hop Generation.* Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press.

Carby, Hazel 1998 (1986): "It Jus Be's Dat Way Sometime: The Sexual Politics of Women's Blues." *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture.* Ed. Robert G. O'Meally. New York: Columbia University Press. 469-482.

Carlyle, Thomas 2007 (1841): *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and The Heroic in History.* Middlesex: The Echo Library.

Carson, Warren 1993: "Albert Murray: Literary Reconstruction of the Vernacular Community." *African American Review* 27.2 (Black South Issue, Part 2): 287-295.

Cataliotti, Robert H. 2007: *The Songs Became the Stories: The Music in African American Fiction, 1970-2005.* New York: Peter Lang.

Caughie, Pamela L. 2005: "Passing as Modernism" *Modernism / Modernity* 12.3: 385-406.

Charters, Ann 2003 (1991): Introduction. *On the Road.* By Jack Kerouac. New York: Penguin. vii-xxix.

Cheseborough, Steve 2009: *Blues Traveling: The Holy Sites of Delta Blues.* Jackson: University of Mississippi Press.

Christian, Barbara 1985 (1980): *Black Women Novelists. The Development of a Tradition, 1892-1976.* Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press.

Cole, Nat King 1994 (c. 1938): "Straighten Up and Fly Right." *Nat King Cole. The Greatest Hits.* Audio CD: Track 6. Capitol.

Coleman, Leon 1998: *Carl Van Vechten and the Harlem Renaissance.* New York: Garland Publishing.

Conrad, Joseph 1999 (1902): *Heart of Darkness and Other Stories.* London: Wordsworth Classics.

Coupe, Laurence 2009 (1997): *Myth.* New York: Routledge.

Crouch, Stanley 1997: "Transcripts for the *Jazz* Interview." <http://www.pbs.org/jazz/about/pdfs/Crouch.pdf> (Accessed June 2, 2011): 1-62.

---. 1991: *Notes of a Hanging Judge. Essays and Reviews, 1979-1989.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Crow, Bill 1990: *Jazz Anecdotes.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Cutter, Martha J. 2008 (2000): "Philomena Speaks: Alice Walker's Revisioning of Rape Archetypes in *The Color Purple*." *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations: Alice Walker's The Color Purple. New Edition.* Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Infobase Publishing. 145-160.

Daniels, Douglas Henry 1985: "The Significance of Blues for American History." *The Journal of Negro History* 70.1/2 (Winter – Spring Issue): 14-23.

Davis, Angela Y. 1998: *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism.* New York: Vintage Books

Davis, Miles, and Quincy Troupe 1990 (1989): *Miles. The Autobiography.* New York: Simon & Schuster.

DeSalvo, Debra 2006: *The Language of the Blues: From Alcorub to Zuzu.* New York: Billboard Books.

DeVeaux, Scott 1991: "Constructing the Jazz Tradition: Jazz Historiography." *Black American Literature Forum* 25.3: 525-560.

---. 1989: "The Emergence of the Jazz Concert, 1935-1945." *American Music* 7.1: 6-29.

Dixon, Willie 1998 (1947): "Signifying Monkey." *Poet of the Blues.* Audio CD: Track 16. Sony.

Douglas, W.W. 1953: "The Meaning of Myth in Modern Criticism." *Modern Philology* 1: 232-242.

Du Bois, William Edward Burghardt 2004 (1903): "The Talented Tenth." *The Social Theory of W.E.B. Du Bois.* Ed. Phil Zuckerman. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications. 185-196.

Dvinge, Anne Christine (2007). *Between History and Hearsay: Imagining Jazz at the Turn of the 21st Century.* PhD Dissertation. Dir. Justin Edwards. Department for English, Germanic and Romance Studies. University of Copenhaguen, Denmark.

Echols, Alice 2003: *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975.* Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press.

Edgerton, Gary R. 2002: "Chalk, Talk, and Videotape: Utilizing Ken Burns's Television Histories in the Classroom." *OAH Magazine of History* 16.4: 16-22.

Edwards, Justin D. 2001: *Exotic Journeys: Exploring the Erotics of U.S. Travel Literature, 1840-1930.* Hanover, New Hampshire: University of New Hampshire Press.

Eliot, T.S. 2005a (1923): "*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth." *Modernism: An Anthology.* Ed. Lawrence Rainey. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing. 165-167.

---. 2005b (1919). "Tradition and the Individual Talent." *Modernism: An Anthology.* Ed. Lawrence Rainey. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing. 152-156.

---. 1986 (1934): *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Ellington, Edward Kennedy „Duke' 1973: *Music Is My Mistress.* New York: Da Capo Press.

Ellison, Ralph 2002a (1976): "„My Strength Comes from Louis Armstrong.' Interview with Robert G. O'Meally." *Living With Music. Ralph Ellison's Jazz Writings*. Ed. Robert G. O'Meally. New York, Random House. 266-288.

---. 2002b: "Letter to Albert Murray. June 2, 1957." *Living With Music. Ralph Ellison's Jazz Writings*. Ed. Robert G. O'Meally. New York, Random House. 240-244.

---. 1999: *Juneteenth.* New York: Vintage Books.

---. 1995a (1952): *Invisible Man.* New York: Vintage International.

---. 1995b (1964): *Shadow and Act*. New York: Vintage International.

---. 1995c: *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison.* Ed. John F. Callahan. New York: Random House.

Ellison, Ralph, and Albert Murray 2000: *Trading Twelves: The Selected Letters of Ralph Ellison and Albert Murray.* Eds. Albert Murray, and John F. Callahan. New York: Vintage Books.

Faulkner, Anne Shaw 2002 (1921): "Does Jazz Put the Sin in Syncopation?" *Jazz in Print (1856-1929). An Anthology of Selected Early Readings in Jazz History.* Ed. Karl Koenig. New York: Pendragon Press. 152-154.

Fay, Jennifer 2004: "„That's Jazz Made in Germany!': *Hallo, Fraülein!* and the Limits of Democratic Pedagogy." *Cinema Journal* 44.1: 3-24.

Feather, Leonard 2001 (1960): "The Jazzman as Critic: The Blindfold Test. „Riddle of the Races.'" *Riffs and Choruses. A New Jazz Anthology.* Ed. Andrew Clark. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group. 215-216.

---. (1945). "On Musical Fascism." *Metronome* 61: 16.

Frazer, Sir James George 1935 (1922): *The Golden Bough. A Study in Magic and Religion.* New York: The MacMillan Company.

Fredrikson, George M. 1987: *The Black Image in the White Mind. The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914.* Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press.

Frye, Northrop 1973 (1957): "Fictional Modes. From *Anatomy of Criticism.*" *Myths and Motifs in Literature.* Eds. David J. Burrows, Frederick R. Lapides, and John T. Shawcross. New York: The Free Press.

Furlonge, Nicole L.B. 1998: "An Instrument Blues-Tinged: Listening, Language, and the Everyday in Sterling Brown's 'Ma Rainey.'" *Callaloo* 21.4: 969-984.

Gabbard, Krin 1995a: Introduction: Writing the Other History of Jazz. *Representing Jazz.* Ed. Krin Gabbard. Durham: Duke University Press. 1-8.

---. 1995b: Introduction: The Jazz Canon and Its Consequences. *Jazz Among the Discourses.* Ed. Krin Gabbard. Durham: Duke University Press. 1-28.

---. 2004 (1992): "Signifyin(g) the Phallus: Mo' Better Blues and Representations of the Jazz Trumpet." *Jazz: A Century of Change. Readings and New Essays*. Ed. Lewis Porter. Belmont, California: Wadsworth Group. 164-170.

Gabbin, Joanne V. 1994: *Sterling A. Brown: Building the Black Aesthetic Tradition.* Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press.

Gair, Christopher 2008: *The Beat Generation.* Oxford: Oneworld.

García Gual, Carlos 1981: *Mitos, viajes, héroes.* Madrid: Taurus.

Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. 1989 (1988): *The Signifying Monkey. A Theory of African American Literary Criticism.* New York: Oxford University Press.

---. 1984: "The Blackness of Blackness: A Critique of the Sign and the Signifying Monkey." *Black Literature and Literary Theory.* Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. New York: Methuen. 285-322.

Gendron, Bernard 1995: "Moldy Figs and Modernists: Jazz at War (1942-1946)." *Jazz Among the Discourses.* Ed. Krin Gabbard. Durham: Duke University Press. 31-56.

Gennari, John 1991: "Jazz Criticism: Its Development and Ideologies." *Black American Literature Forum* 25.3: 449-523.

Giddins, Gary 1998. *Visions of Jazz.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Gilyard, Keith 1985: "The Sociolinguistics of Underground Blues." *Black American Literature Forum* 19.4: 158-159.

Gioia, Ted 1988: *The Imperfect Art. Reflections on Jazz and Modern Culture.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Glick, Elisa F. 2003: "Harlem's Queer Dandy: African American Modernism and the Artifice of Blackness." *Modern Fiction Writing* 49.3: 414-422.

Gloster, Hugh M. 1945: "The Van Vechten Vogue." *Phylon (1940-1956).* 6.4: 310-314.

Goll, Ivan 2004 (1926): "The Negroes are Conquering Europe." *Modernism and Music. An Anthology of Sources.* Ed. Daniel Albright. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 378-380.

Gordon, H.S. 2002 (1925): "The Jazz Myth." *Jazz in Print (1856-1929). An Anthology of Selected Early Readings in Jazz History.* Ed. Karl Koenig. New York: Pendragon Press. 430.

Gorky, Maxim 1993 (1928): "Excerpt „On the Music of the Gross.'" *Reading Jazz.* Ed. David Meltzer. San Francisco: Mercury House. 111-112.

Gracyk, Theodore 2002: "Jazz After *Jazz*: Ken Burns and the Construction of Jazz History." *Philosophy and Literature* 26: 173-187.

Gridley, Mark, Robert Maxham, and Robert Hoff 2004 (1989): "Three Approaches to Defining Jazz." *Jazz: A Century of Change –Readings and New Essays.* Ed. Lewis Porter. Belmont, California: Wadsworth Group. 18-36.

Gysin, Fritz 2002: "From „Liberating Voices' to „Metathetic Ventriloquism': Boundaries in Recent African American Jazz Fiction. *Callaloo* 25.1: 274-287.

Hamilton, Marybeth 2000: "Sexuality, Authenticity and the Making of the Blues Tradition." *Past and Present* 169: 132-160.

Handy, William Christopher 1991 (1941): *Father of the Blues.* New York: Da Capo Press.

Harris, Middleton A., Morris Levitt, Roger Furman, and Ernest Smith 1974: *The Black Book.* New York: Random House.

Harris, William J. 2004: "„How You Sound??': Amiri Baraka Writes Free Jazz." *Uptown Conversation: The New Jazz Studies.* Eds. Robert G. O'Meally, Brent Hayes Edwards, and Farah Jasmine Griffin. New York: Columbia University Press. 312-325.

Harrison, Daphne Duval 2000 (1988): *Black Pearls. Blues Queens of the 1920s.* New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

Heehs, Peter 1994: "Myth, History, and Theory." *History and Myth* 33.1: 1-19.

Helbling, Mark 1976: "Carl Van Vechten and the Harlem Renaissance." *Negro American Literature Forum* 10.2: 39-47.

Hemingway, Ernest 1993 (1934): "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place." *The Essential Hemingway.* London: Arrow Books. 433-436.

Hendrickson, Robert 2001 (1987): "Come on, Jazz!" *Riffs and Choruses. A New Jazz Anthology.* Ed. Andrew Clark. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group. 23-24.

Hentoff, Nat 1972: "White Writer / Black Music." *American Journal* 1.2.: 11-14.

Herodotus 2005 (c. 450 BC – c. 420 BC): *The Histories of Herodotus.* Trans. Henry Cary. Whitefish, Montana: Kessinger Publishing.

Hodeir, André 1956: *Jazz: Its Evolution and Essence.* Trans. David Noakes. New York: Grove Press.

Holmes, David G. 2006: "Cross-Racial Voicing: Carl Van Vechten's Imagination and the Search for an African American Ethos." *College English* 68.3: 291-307.

Holmes, John Clellon 1980 (1958): *The Horn.* Berkeley: Creative Arts Books.

---. 1967: *Nothing More to Declare.* New York: E.P. Dutton and Company.

Huggins, Nathan Irvin 2007 (1971): *Harlem Renaissance.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Hurston, Zora Neale 1998 (1934): "Characteristics of Negro Expression." *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture.* Ed. Robert G. O'Meally. New York: Columbia University Press. 298-310.

---. 1990 (1935): *Mules and Men.* New York: Harper Perennial.

Hutchinson, George 2006: *In Search of Nella Larsen. A Biography of the Color Line.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Ikard, David 2007: *Breaking the Silence: Toward a Black Male Feminist Criticism.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.

Jackson, Jeffrey H. 2002: "Making Jazz French: The Reception of Jazz Music in Paris, 1927-1934." *French Historical Studies* 25.1: 149-170.

Jackson, Lawrence 2005: "Ralph Ellison's Invented Life: A Meeting with the Ancestors." *The Cambridge Companion to Ralph Ellison.* Ed. Ross Posnock. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 11-34.

---. 2000: "The Birth of the Critic: The Literary Friendship of Ralph Ellison and Richard Wright." *American Literature* 72.2: 321-355.

Jazz 2004 (2000). Dir. Ken Burns. Written by Geoffrey C. Prod. Ken Burns, and Lynn Novick. Ward. Divisa Home Video. Valladolid: Divisa Home Video, The Jazz Film Project Inc. Produced by Florentine Films and Weta in Association with BBC, Washington DC.

Jefferson, Margo 1999: "Transcripts for the *Jazz* Interview." <http://www.pbs.org/jazz/about/pdfs/Jefferson.pdf> (Accessed June 2, 2011):1-30

Jervin, Ryan 2004: "Early Jazz Literature (And Why You Didn't Know)." *American Literary History* 16.4: 648-674.

Jewett, Robert, and John Shelton Lawrence 1977: *The American Monomyth.* Garden City: Anchor Press / Doubleday.

Johnson, Maria V. 1996: "„You Just Can't Keep a Good Woman Down': Alice Walker Sings the Blues." *African American Review* 30.2: 221-236.

Johnson, Rob 2007: "The Horn" *Encyclopedia of Beat Literature.* Ed. Kurt Hemmer. New York: Infobase Publishing. 132-135.

Johnson, Robert 1996 (1937). "Cross Road Blues." *Robert Johnson. The Complete Recordings.* Audio CD, CD 1: Track 18. Sony.

Kater, Michael H. 1989: "Forbidden Fruit? Jazz and the Third Reich." *The American Historical Review* 94.1: 11-43.

Kear, Jon 1996: "*Vénus noire*: Josephine Baker and the Parisian Music-Hall." *Parisian Fields.* Ed. Michael Sheringham. London: Reaktion Books. 46-70.

Kenney, William Howland 1995: "Historical Context and the Definition of Jazz: Putting More of the History in „Jazz History.'" *Jazz Among the Discourses.* Ed. Krin Gabbard. Durham: Duke University Press. 100-116.

Kerman, Joseph 1985: *Contemplating Music: Challenges to Musicology.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Kerouac, Jack 2003 (1957): *On the Road.* New York: Penguin.

Kingsley, Walter 2007 (1917): "Whence Comes Jass?" *The New Negro: Readings on Race, Representation, and African American Culture. 1892-1938.* Eds. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Gene Andrew Jarrett. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 479.

Kodat, Catherine Gunther 2003: "Conversing with Ourselves: Canon, Freedom, Jazz." *American Quarterly* 55.1: 1-28.

Kofsky, Frank 1971: "The Jazz Tradition: Black Music and Its White Critics." *Journal of Black Studies* 1.4: 403-433.

Kouwenhoven, John A. 1998 (1954): "What's „American' About America." *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture.* Ed. Robert G. O'Meally. New York: Columbia University Press. 123-136.

Kraut, Anthea 2003: "Between Primitivism and Diaspora: The Dance Performances of Josephine Baker, Zora Neale Hurston, and Katherine Dunham." *Theatre Journal* 55.3: 433-450.

Lambert, Constant 1993 (1934): "The Spirit of Jazz." *Reading Jazz.* Ed. David Meltzer. San Francisco: Mercury House. 106-111.

Lane, James B. 1973: "Underground to Manhood: Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man.*" *Negro American Literature Forum* 7.2: 64-72.

Lauret, Maria 2000: *Modern Novelists: Alice Walker*. New York: Palgrave.

Lee, Maurice A. 2004: *The Aesthetics of LeRoi Jones / Amiri Baraka: The Rebel Poet.* Valencia: Biblioteca Javier Coy d'estudis nord-americans, Universidad de Valencia.

Leigh, Henry 2002 (1926): "What's Wrong with Jazz?" *Jazz in Print (1856-1929). An Anthology of Selected Early Readings in Jazz History.* Ed. Karl Koenig. New York: Pendragon Press. 492.

Leonard, Neil 1987: *Jazz: Myth and Religion.* New York, Oxford University Press.

---. 1986: "The Jazzman's Verbal Usage." *Black American Literature Forum* 20.1/2: 151-160.

---. 1962: *Jazz and the White Americans.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Lévi-Strauss, Claude 2006 (1978): *Myth and Meaning.* London: Routledge.

---. 1955: "The Structural Study of Myth." *Journal of American Folklore* 68: 428-444.

Levine, Lawrence 1989: "Jazz and American Culture." *The Journal of American Folklore* 102.403: 6-22.

---. 1978: *Black Culture and Black Consciousness. Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Lomax, Alan 1950: *Mister Jelly Roll. The Fortunes of Jelly Roll Morton, New Orleans Creole and Inventor of Jazz.* New York: Grosset & Dunlap.

Lott, Eric 1995: "Double V, Double-Time: Bebop's Politics of Style." *Jazz Among the Discourses.* Ed. Krin Gabbard. Durham: Duke University Press. 243-255.

Mackey, Nathaniel 1995: "Other: From Noun to Verb." *Jazz Among the Discourses.* Ed. Krin Gabbard. Durham: Duke University Press. 76-99.

McNeill, William 1986: *Mythistory and Other Essays.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

McRae, Richard 2001: "„What Is Hip?' and Other Inquiries in Jazz Slang Lexicography." *Notes* 57.3: 574-584.

Mailer, Norman 1992 (1957): "The White Negro." *Advertisements for Myself.* Norman Mailer. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 337-358.

Major, Clarence 2004 (1994): "From *Juba to Jive: A Dictionary of African American Slang.*" *Jazz: A Century of Change – Early Readings and New Essays.* Ed. Lewis Porter. Belmont, California: Wadsworth Group. 2.

Mali, Joseph 2003: *Mythistory: The Making of Modern Historiography.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Malinowski, Bronislaw 1955 (1925): *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays.* Ed. Robert Redfield. New York: Doubleday Anchor Books.

Malraux, André 1990 (1951): *The Voices of Silence.* Trans. Stuart Gilbert. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Marsalis, Wynton 1999: "Transcripts for the *Jazz* Interview." <http://www.pbs.org/jazz/about/pdfs/MarsalisW.pdf> (Accessed June 2, 2011): 1-33.

Marsalis, Wynton, and Robert G. O'Meally 1998: "Duke Ellington: „Music Like a Big Hot Pot of Good Gumbo.'" *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture.* Ed. Robert G. O'Meally. New York: Columbia University Press.143-153.

Marsalis, Wynton, James Lincoln Collier, and Andre Craddock-Willis 1995: "Jazz People." *Transition* 65: 140-178.

Marvin, Thomas F. 1994: "„Preachin' the Blues': Bessie Smith's Secular Religion and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*." *African American Review* 28.3: 411-421.

Meletinski, Eleazar Moiseevich 2000 (1993): *The Poetics of Myth.* Trans. Guy Lanue, and Alexandre Sadetsky. New York: Routledge.

Melnick, Jeffrey 2001 (1999): *A Right to Sing the Blues. African Americans, Jews, and American Popular Song.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Meltzer, David, Ed. 1993: *Reading Jazz.* San Francisco: Mercury House.

Mencken, Henry Louis 1995: *A Second Mencken Chrestomathy.* Ed. Terry Teachout. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Merriman, Alan P., and Fradley H. Garner 1998 (1960): "Jazz – The Word." *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture.* Ed. Robert G. O'Meally. New York: Columbia University Press. 7-31.

Meyer, Leonard B. 1961 (1956): *Emotion and Meaning in Music.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Mezzrow, Mezz, and Bernard Wolfe 1964 (1946): *Really the Blues.* New York: Signet Books.

Mitchell-Kernan, Claudia 1971: *Language Behavior in a Black Urban Community.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Monson, Ingrid 1994: "Doubleness and Jazz Improvisation: Irony, Parody, Ethnomusicology." *Critical Inquiry* 20: 283-313.

Montagu, Ashley 1997 (1941): *Man's Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Race.* Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield.

Morrison, Toni 1992: *Playing in the Dark. Whiteness and the Literary Imagination.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Moynihan, Daniel 1965: *Moynihan Report.* <http://www.blackpast.org/?q=primary/moynihan-report-1965> (Accessed January 21, 2011)

Murray, Albert 2001: *From the Briarpatch File. On Context, Procedure, and American Identity.* New York: Pantheon Books.

---. 2000 (1976): *Stomping the Blues.* New York: Da Capo Press.

---. 1998a: "Improvisation and the Creative Process." *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture.* Ed. Robert G. O'Meally. New York: Columbia University Press. 111-113.

---. 1998b (1974): *Train Whistle Guitar.* New York: Vintage Books.

---. 1996: *The Blue Devils of Nada.* New York: Vintage Books.

---. 1995 (1973): *The Hero and the Blues.* New York: Vintage Books.

---. 1991 (1971): *South to a Very Old Place.* New York: Vintage Books.

---. 1990 (1970): *The Omni-Americans. Black Experience and American Culture.* New York: Da Capo Press.

Murray, Albert, and Marvin Gelfand 1997 (1974): "Taking a Leaf: A Talk with Albert Murray." *Conversations with Albert Murray.* Ed. Roberta S. Maguire. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi. 8-14.

Murray, Albert, and Charles H. Rowell 1997: "An All-Purpose, All-American Literary Intellectual. An Interview with Albert Murray." *Callaloo* 20.2: 399-414.

Nietzsche, Friedrich 2000 (1872): *The Birth of Tragedy.* Oxford: Oxford World's Classics.

O'Meally, Robert G. 2004: "Checking Our Balances: Louis Armstrong, Ralph Ellison, and Betty Boop." *Uptown Conversation: The New Jazz Studies.* Eds. Robert G. O'Meally, Brent Hayes Edwards, and Farah Jasmine Griffin. New York: Columbia University Press. 278-296.

---. 1998: Preface. *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture.* Ed. Robert G. O'Meally. New York: Columbia University Press. ix-xvi.

O'Meally, Robert G., Brent Hayes Edwards, and Farah Jasmine Griffin 2004: Introductory Notes. *Uptown Conversation: The New Jazz Studies.* Eds. Robert G. O'Meally, Brent Hayes Edwards, and Farah Jasmine Griffin. New York: Columbia University Press. 1-6.

Osgood, Henry Osborne 1926: *So This Is Jazz.* <http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=17759575> (Accessed December 16, 2010)

Ostendorf, Berndt 1986: "Antropology, Modernism, and Jazz." *Modern Critical Views: Ralph Ellison.* Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House Publishers. 145-172.

Panassié, Hugues 2005 (1942): *The Real Jazz.* Whitefish, Montana: Kessinger Publishing.

Panish, Jon 1997: *The Color of Jazz. Race and Representation in Postwar American Culture.* Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.

Parncutt, Richard 2007: "Systematic Musicology and the History and Future of Western Musical Scholarship." *Journal of Interdisciplinary Music Studies* 1.1: 1-32.

Pfeiffer, Kathleen 2000: Introduction. *Nigger Heaven.* By Carl Van Vechten. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press. ix-xxxix.

Pinsker, Sanford 1996: "Albert Murray: The Black Intellectuals' Maverick Patriarch." *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 72: 678-684.

Pond, Steven F. 2003: "Jamming the Reception: Ken Burns, *Jazz*, and the Problem of „America's Music.'" *Notes* 60.1: 11-45.

Porter, Horace A. 2001: *Jazz Country. Ralph Ellison in America.* Iowa City: University of Iowa Press.

Porter, Lewis 2004: *Jazz: A Century of Change – Readings and New Essays.* Belmont, California: Wadsworth Group.

Raglan, FitzRoy Somerset, Baron, Lord 2004 (1934): "The Hero of Tradition." "Introduction." *The Myth and Ritual Theory.* Ed. Robert A. Segal. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers. 193-208.

Rampersad, Arnold 2007: *Ralph Ellison: A Biography.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Rasula, Jed 1995: "The Media of Memory: The Seductive Menace of Records in Jazz History." *Jazz Among the Discourses.* Ed. Krin Gabbard. Durham: Duke University Press. 134-162.

Ricoeur, Paul 1991: "Life in Quest of Narrative." *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation* Ed. David Wood. London: Routledge. 20-33.

Romaguera i Ramió, Joaquim 2002: *El jazz y sus espejos.* Madrid: Ediciones de la Torre.

Rose, Phyllis 1989: *Jazz Cleopatra: Josephine Baker in Her Time.* New York: Doubleday Books.

Ruiz de Elvira, Antonio 2000 (1982): *Mitología clásica.* Madrid: Gredos.

Sanderson, Stewart 1961: *Hemingway.* London: Oliver and Boyd LTD.

Sandke, Randall 2010: *Where the Dark and the Light Folks Meet. Race and Mythology, Politics, and the Business of Jazz.* Plymouth, UK: Scarecrow Press.

Schuller, Gunther 1968: *Early Jazz: Its Roots and Musical Development.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Schuyler, George S. 1950: "Phylon Profile, XXII: Carl Van Vechten." *Phylon (1940-1956)* 11.4: 362-368.

Segal, Robert A. 2004 (1998): "Introduction." *The Myth and Ritual Theory.* Ed. Robert A. Segal. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers. 1-13.

Sehgal, Kabir 2008: *Jazzocracy: Jazz, Democracy, and the Creation of a New American Mythology.* Mishawaka, Indiana: Better World Books.

Seldes, Gilbert 2004 (1924): "Tojours Jazz." *Jazz: A Century of Change –Readings and New Essays.* Ed. Lewis Porter. Belmont, California: Wadsworth Group. 134-140.

Sherrill, Joya 1999: "Transcripts for the *Jazz* Interview." <http://www.pbs.org/jazz/about/pdfs/Sherrill.pdf> (Accessed June 2, 2011): 1-13.

Smalls, James 2006: *The Homoerotic Photography of Carl Van Vechten. Public Face, Private Thoughts.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Smith, Bessie 1997 (1927): "A Good Man is Hard to Find." *The Essential Bessie Smith.* Audio CD, CD 2: Track 5. Somy.

---. 1993a (1931): “In the House Blues.” *Bessie Smith: The Complete Recordings.* Vol. 4. Audio CD, CD 2: Track 17. Sony.

---. 1993c (1929): “I’m Wild About that Thing.” *Bessie Smith: The Complete Recordings.* Vol. 4. Audio CD, CD 1: Track 15. Sony.

---. 1993b (1928): “Empty Bed Blues, Part 2.” *Bessie Smith: The Complete Recordings.* Vol. 4. Audio CD, CD 1: Track 5. Sony.

Smith, Clay, Walter R. Spalding, and Fred Stone 2002 (1924): “Where Is Jazz Leading America?” *Jazz in Print (1856-1929). An Anthology of Selected Early Readings in Jazz History.* Ed. Karl Koenig. New York: Pendragon Press. 353-356.

Smith, Kimberly K. 2007: *African American Environmental Thought.* Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas.

Spaeth, Sigmund 2005 (1930): “Jazz Is Not Music.” *The 1930 American Scrap Book.* Ed. William Griffith. Whitefish, Montana: Kessinger Publishing. 276-277.

Spillers, Hortense J. 2003: *Black, White, and In Color. Essays on American Literature and Culture.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Stearns, Marshall.W. 1970: *The Story of Jazz.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Strauss, David 1965: “French Critics and American Jazz.” *American Quarterly* 17.3: 582-587.

Stubblefield, Anna 2005: *Ethics Along the Color Line.* Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.

Tager, Michael 1986: “Myth and Politics in the Works of Sorel and Barthes.” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 47.4: 625-639.

Taylor, Jeffrey 2008: “With Lovie and Lil: Rediscovering Two Chicago Pianists of the 1920s.” *Big Ears: Listening for Gender in Jazz Studies.* Eds. Nichole T. Rustin and Sherrie Tucker. Durham: Duke University Press. 48-63.

Terrell, Mary Church 2005 (1940): *A Colored Woman in a White World.* New York: Humanity Books.

Thomson, Virgil 2004 (1938): “Swing Again.” *Jazz: A Century of Change –Readings and New Essays.* Ed. Lewis Porter. Belmont, California: Wadsworth Group. 47-53.

Townsend, Peter 2000: *Jazz in American Culture.* Jackson: University of Mississippi Press.

Trenchard, John 2000 (1972): "From *The Natural History of Superstition.*" *The Rise of Modern Mythology (1680-1860).* Eds. Burton Feldman and Robert D. Richardson, Jr. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 35-40.

Trilling, Lionel 1982 (1971): *Sincerity and Authenticity. The Charles Eliot Norton Lectures, 1969-1970.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Tucker, Mark 1998: "Musicology and New Jazz Studies." Review of *Representing Jazz* and *Jazz Among the Discourses*, ed. Krin Gabbard, Durham: Duke University Press, 1995. *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 51: 131-148.

---. Ed. 1993: *The Duke Ellington Reader.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Tucker, Sherrie 2005: "Deconstructing the Jazz Tradition: The „Subjectless Subject' of New Jazz Studies." *The Source* 2: 31-46.

---. 2002: "Big Ears: Listening for Gender in Jazz Studies." *Current Musicology.* Ed. Austin Clarkson. New York: Columbia University Press. 375-408.

---. "Women in Jazz." <http://www.pbs.org/jazz/time/time_women.htm> (Accessed June 1, 2011)

Twing, Stephen W. 1998: *Myths, Models, and U.S. Foreign Policy: The Cultural Shaping of Three Cold Warriors.* Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Ulanov, Barry 2001 (1947): "Moldy Figs vs. Moderns!" *Riffs and Choruses. A New Jazz Anthology.* Ed. Andrew Clark. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group. 137-138.

Van Vechten, Carl 2003: *The Splendid Drunken Twenties. Selections from the Daybooks, 1922-1930.* Ed. Bruce Kellner. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

---. 2000 (1926): *Nigger Heaven.* Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

---. 1979: *Keep A-Inching Along: Selected Writings of Carl Van Vechten about Black Arts and Letters.* Ed. Bruce Kellner. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press.

---. 1926: "The Negro in Art: How Shall He Be Portrayed? A Symposium" *The Crisis:* 219.

Wald, Elijah 2004: *Escaping the Delta. Robert Johnson and the Invention of the Blues.* New York: Amistad.

Walker, Alice 2003 (1982): *The Color Purple.* New York: Hartcourt.

---. 1983: *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens. Womanist Prose.* New York: Harvest / Hartcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Walser, Robert 1995: "'Out of Notes': Signification, Interpretation, and the Problem of Miles Davis." *Jazz Among the Discourses.* Ed. Krin Gabbard. Durham: Duke University Press. 165-183.

Walton, Priscilla L. 2008 (1990): "„What She Got to Sing About?': Comedy and *The Color Purple.*" *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations: Alice Walker's The Color Purple. New Edition.* Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Infobase Publishing. 65-77.

Warren, Karen J. 2000: *Ecofeminist Philosophy.* Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield.

Weissman, Adolf 2002 (1927): "The Standardization of Jazz." *Jazz in Print (1856-1929). An Anthology of Selected Early Readings in Jazz History.* Ed. Karl Koenig. New York: Pendragon Press. 524.

Wentworth, Harold, and Stuart Berg Flexner 1960: *Dictionary of American Slang.* New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company.

Whaley, Preston, Jr. 2004: *Blows Like a Horn: Beat Writing, Jazz, Style, and Markets in the Transformation of the U.S. Culture.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

White, Evelyn C. 2004: *Alice Walker: A Life.* New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

White, Shane, and Graham White 2005: *The Sounds of Slavery. Discovering African American History through Songs, Sermons, and Speech.* Boston: Beacon Press.

Whitman, Walt 2004 (1855): *Leaves of Grass. First and "Death-Bed" Editions.* New York: Barnes & Noble Classics.

Whyton, Tony 2010: *Jazz Icons: Heroes, Myths, and the Jazz Tradition.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Williams, Delores S. 1985: "Black Women's Literature and the Task of Feminist Theology." *Immaculate and Powerful: The Female in Sacred Image and Social Reality.* Eds. Clarissa Atkinson, Constance H. Buchanan, and Margaret R. Miles. Boston: Beacon. 88-110.

Williams, Martin 1970: *The Jazz Tradition.* New York: Oxford University Press.

---. 1958: "Criticism: The Path of the Jazz Critic." *Down Beat* 21: 11, 42.

Wilton, David 2004: *Word Myths: Debunking Linguistic Urban Legends.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Wright, John S. 2005: "Ellison's Experimental Attitude and the Technologies of Illumination." *The Cambridge Companion to Ralph Ellison.* Ed. Ross Posnock. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 157-171.